MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY

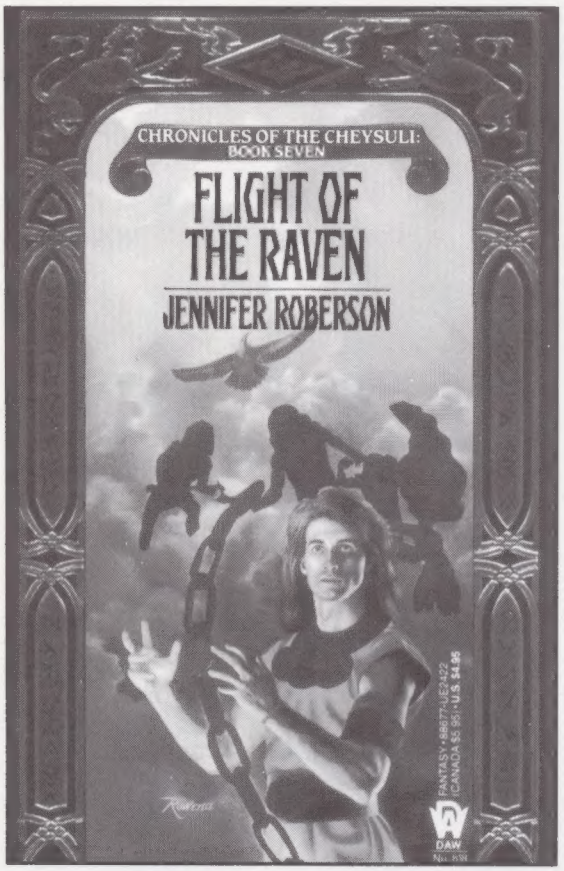
Magazine
Issue 10
$3.95

Mercedes Lackey
John Morressy
Steve Rasnic Tem

Janet Kagan
Micole Sudberg
Earl Vickers

10
0 74470 78279 7

Will the heir to the Lion Throne prove the weak link that destroys the age-old Prophecy of the First born?



Chronicles of the Cheysuli: Book Seven

FLIGHT OF THE RAVEN

Jennifer Roberson

Aidan, only child of Brennan and Aileen, and the grandson of Niall, is heir to the Lion Throne of Homana and inheritor, too, of a prophecy carried down through the generations and finally on the verge of fulfillment. But will Aidan—driven as he is by strange visions and portents—prove the weak link in the ages-old prophecy, the Cheysuli who fails to achieve his foretold destiny?

For as Aidan prepares to set out for Erinn to claim his betrothed, he will become the focus of forces out of legend, visited by the ghosts of long-dead kinsmen, and by the Hunter, a mysterious being who may be a Cheysuli god incarnate. Commanded by the Hunter to undertake a quest to claim a series of "god-given" golden links, Aidan will find himself challenged by the Cheysuli's most deadly foe, Lochiel, the son of Strahan, who will use every trick of Ihlini sorcery to stop Aidan and destroy the promise of the prophecy once and for all....

◆ DAW Fantasy /Original
0-88677-422-5/$4.95 ($5.95 in Canada)

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:

Elsie B. Wollheim
DAW Books
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014

Distributed by
NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY
A divison of
PENGUIN USA

DAW FANTASY

Marion Zimmer Bradley
Jan Burke
EDITORS & PUBLISHERS

Valued Assistants
David Bradley
Bobbe Lee

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY MAGAZINE
Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd.
P.O. Box 11095
Oakland, CA 94611-9991

HOW TO CONTACT US:
SUBMISSIONS:
Fantasy Magazine welcomes free-lance submissions. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage. *Fantasy Magazine* publishes quarterly original all new short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 7,500 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 2,500 and 5,000 words. *Fantasy Magazine* pays professional rates and pays on acceptance. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts, a duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers at a special rate of: $3.00 (plus $0.50 postage and handling). Requests for WRITERS GUIDELINES should include a self addressed stamped envelope.
Address all Submissions to:
Fantasy Magazine, **Story Department**
PO Box 245-A,
BERKELEY, CA 94701.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: All written comments, questions, and suggestions regarding any aspect of the magazine are read by our editors and are assumed intended for publication. We reserve the right to edit all submissions; letters must include your name and address.
Please address all correspondence to:
Letters to the Editor
P.O. Box 11095,
Oakland, CA, 94611-9991.
SUBSCRIPTIONS: Individual subscriptions are $14.00 for 4 issues in the U.S., $20.00 in Canada, $30.00 for foreign subscriptions. Make all checks payable to: Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Individual copies are $3.95 plus shipping charges, which are: U.S. $1.00, Canada $1.80, foreign $5.55.
BACK ISSUES: Write to:
Fantasy Magazine, Back Issues Dept.
P.O. Box 11095
Oakland, CA 94611-9991
ADVERTISING:
Rates available on request.
BOOKSELLERS:
Discounts available, for information call (415) 601-9000 or write to our Business Address.
Contents copyright © 1990
by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd.
Third class postage paid at Berkeley, CA
POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to:
Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd.,
P.O. Box 11095
Oakland, CA 94611-9991
(415) 601-9000

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S FANTASY

Magazine

...from ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety beasties
And things that go bump! in the night,
Good Lord deliver us.
--old Prayer.

This old prayer seemed right to bring you at Hallowe'en.

Hallowe'en was originally the Feast of the Dead, Samhain, the time when the dead left their graves to walk among the living. I had very common-sensical parents who said (before I was old enough to fully remember) that the good Dead in Heaven would not be permitted by God to terrify anyone; and I think I must have figured out for myself that the evil Dead in Hell, if there were any, had a lot more to worry about than scaring anyone. Hence, even the scariest horror story has never scared me. (Revolted me, sometimes; but that's another story.)

Even today, in Mexico and other Catholic countries, Hallowe'en is celebrated (?) with sugar skulls and skeletons. Here in this country, costumed children go about demanding sweets and treats, and a sort of organized license prevails. The Catholic church, when it took over, converted the Day of the Dead into the sacred Feast of All Hallows---and to the Feast of All Saints, which is November First.

This is the darkest time of the year. Humanity seems to need to explore its own darkest side. My late aunt Marion used to tell me a wonderful creepy story about the Cathedral of All Saints, in Albany, New York, where chimes rang at Hallowe'en, even in the locked and barred Cathedral---in spite of the fact that there *weren't* any chimes in the Cathedral.

Well, those were gentler days. Now kids watch "slasher" movies and attend costume parties in local churches instead of being able to roam the streets safely. But the basic fact remains: that many people get a kick out of being scared.

So this issue we present you a line-up of stories I selected for the season, to scare you gently without revolting you: Micole Sudberg's Russian fairy tale of Baba Yaga, whom you see on our cover; Steve Rasnic Tem's wonderfully creepy *Playing Dead*. In quite another vein, a very funny story by Mercedes Lackey, bringing back Diana Tregarde and her friendly vampire sidekick Andre; and a serious and thoughtful 'Deal with the Devil' story, *A Dollar for Your Soul.*

We have many other wonderful stories, too; so instead of terrifying anyone, sit down and celebrate the Day of the Dead---or any other day---with us.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

Fantasy Magazine

Issue 10 Autumn 1990

Cover Story –

Vassilissa The Fair

by Micole Sudberg *page 4*

Art by George Barr
Cover Art by James Balkovek

A special retelling of a Russian Folk Tale in a non-linear style. I usually don't choose such a style because they're too hard to follow, but Micole keeps this one very well under control. Follow the weaving of this intricate story.

Playing Dead

by Steve Rasnic Tem *page 38*

Art by James Balkovek

Here's possibly the creepiest story we're ever likely to print: a metaphor for real life, by a well-know award winning writer.

What a Wizard Does

by Janet Kagan

Art by Alicia Austin *page 20*

It isn't all Words of Power and Beings from a Higher Plane, you know... Here's a story about the lighter side of magic.

Satanic, Versus... 6
by Mercedes Lackey
Art by Vincent Di Fate
Diana Tregarde, famous urban witch, and her friendly vampire sidekick, Andre, return to our pages.

A Dollar For Your Soul 12
by Earl Vickers
Art by James Balkovek
In this story you'll find one of the slimiest characters we hope you'll never meet —but there *are* people like this out there, and I for one would prefer to encounter them in the pages of fantasy.

Witch Hunt 17
by Bobbi Miller
A shuddery saga of a witches duel.

Potion 25
by Joseph M. Kurtenbach
A story of a magical spell - but this one involves a searing moral choice, written in a romantic style.

The Loser 28
by John Downing
Art by James Balkovek
Did you ever have the feeling it was going to be one of those lifetimes? Did you ever make a bet, collect the winnings -- and wonder if you'd really won? Here in the office we're divided. Jan is dying to know what you think– did he win or lose?

The Wizard Beside Himself 32
by John Morressy
Art by George Barr
A lost tale out of the annals of Kedrigern, magican and adventurer.

The Reluctant Vampire 43
by Deborah Millitello
Art by Brad Hamann
A short-short by one of our well known writers. Follow Sharon on a surprising adventure, and be careful what parties *you* go to!

Deep Catch 45
by Al Onia
Art by James Balkovek
A South American story of cultures in conflict, an anthropological fantasy.

The Bane of the Red Queen 49
by Kit Wesler
Art by James Balkovek
A short-short with a most dislikeable character.

Feodor Felonis and the Thief 51
by Bob Liddil
Art by George Barr
One of our regular contributors offers up a new short-short with the feel of an Asiatic folktale.

Cat Fight 53
by Becky Sparks
Even magicians make big mistakes — and then somebody else has to clean up the mess.

OUR REGULAR FEATURES

An Interview with Diana Paxson
by Marion Zimmer Bradley 41
From one writer to another, life and kids.

Marion Zimmer Bradley
Talks To Writers 47
I seriously considered having some art done showing Marion with an Uzi, so you would at least be warned. Put your bullet proof vests on before reading this one.

Writers Talk Back 47
A letter column of special interest to writers, including MZB's forthcoming appearances.

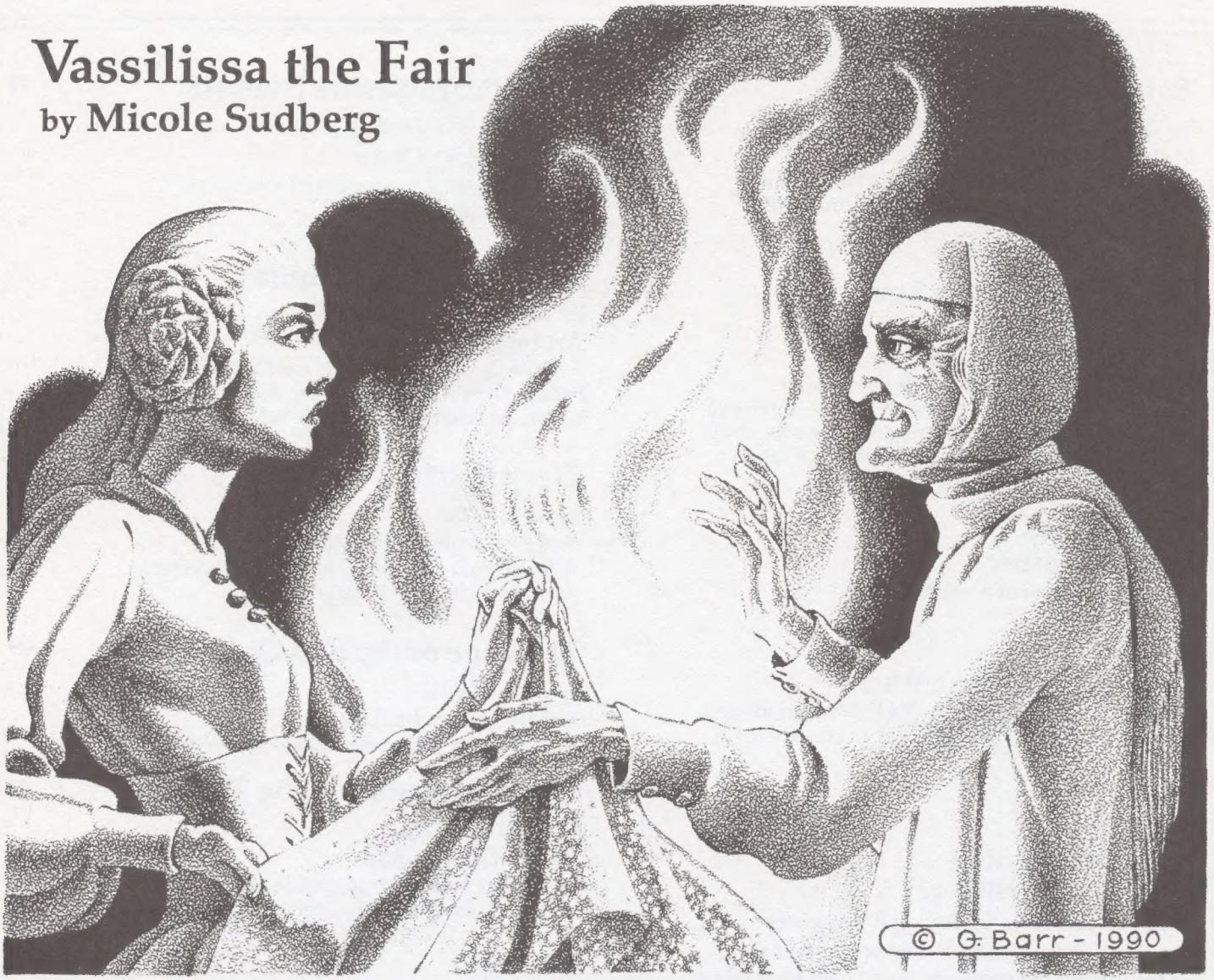
Letters Column 57
Denigration of males??? "Literary" vs. "Commercial" Fiction, "So Many Books, So Little Time", and many more. Please join us. If you have an opinion on what you read here - we'd like to know about it.

Contributors 61
Meet the authors of our Autumn Issue

The Cauldron 63
Your chance to voice your choice of stories - and if you haven't completed the Cauldron from the Special Short-Short Issue, please do it today, so that I may have the results available by at least the next issue!!!-jlb

Vassilissa the Fair

by Micole Sudberg



Fire. The skull's eyes burned; it rested, blackened and scorched, in the corner, its toothless mouth jeering. Fire at the wooden frame of the house, streamers flowering gold, yellow, orange, blue. Vassilissa wove, remembering. The fire filled her bones, incandescent in the marrow, shimmering in her tendons, burning them translucent; her skin glowed from beneath, and her dark eyes echoed the flame's-heart blue. The fire bled from her fingers into the cloth, and she watched it burning, burning...

What do you want? Baba Yaga had said, in her hut filled with burnt bones and rotting cloth and a shadowy, cobwebbed cauldron. The old witch's eyes were narrow and vulpine, pupils slitted like the pupils of a cat. *What do you want?*

My step-sisters have sent me to beg of you a fire, she had answered, shivering.

Sometimes the cloth fell away. "Thread," she murmured, "where is the thread?"

The old woman, trembling, tried to lift her hands from the loom. "Come, Vassya, come..."

The slender fingers gripped the wooden rim; she would not move from her seat. The dying sun stained the windows red; shadows flooded the floor, flowing past Vassilissa's knees.

The old woman let go, and said, quivering, "There is no more thread."

She was Vassilissa's great-aunt. In the narrow features, the paleness of the wrinkled skin, and in the great dark eyes, blinking fearfully, were the faint breaths of a resemblance, of a lost beauty. Her hands always trembled, crippled with age, the knuckles stiff and engorged.

"Bring me thread," she whispered.

"There is no more thread."

"Bring me wool, and I will spin."

There was wool in her hands, and a spindle. The thread dripped to the floor, tangling in a slender fiery trail among the shadows. Her touch dyed the thread the colors of flame: orange, red-gold, bright yellow, lemon yellow, flickers of blue. There was fire, always fire.

The fire's gone out, her stepsister had said. Marissa snatched the spindle out of her hands, cast it clattering on the floor. Her smooth brown hair was coiled in an orderly knot at the nape of her neck. *Go and borrow burning coals from a villager.*

But it's cold. She appealed to her other step-sister, Ivorna. *It's night out, we have no neighbors-- where am I to find fire?*

Their long, pale hands shoved her out of the hut, sent her sprawling in the snow. She heard the bolt go home.

Ivorna! she cried. *Marissa!* She beat

upon the door, bruising her hands. *Let me in, it's so cold...*

One laughed. Marissa called, *Get some fire and you won't be cold! Bring us fire and we'll let you in.*

Ivorna called sweetly, *Go ask Baba Yaga for it!*

Yes! Go!

Fire devoured the world. Her step-sisters shrieked, cowering from the skull's gaze. Flames ran along their bones, igniting their long brown hair. The hut burned, on the white snow, in the black night. Shadows danced.

She wove. Her hands plucked the threads, pulled, measured, clipped. She saw fire spill over the loom. The skull, pale now, laughed, forever in its corner; the fire glimmered beneath her pale hands, falsely quiescent.

Trust it, the skull cajoled her. *Trust it—it won't leap suddenly, burning, burning...*

"Liar," she said viciously, and the skull laughed. The old aunt flinched, and wrapped herself tightly in her sole blanket, and tried to sleep. The loom clacked, and she saw, behind her closed eyelids, the girl's pale face, the dark eyes fixed on a vision. *What is it?* the old woman had asked once, afraid. *What do you see?*

A febrile grin, or grimace of pain. *Fire...*

Her step-sisters died, twisting in flame, screaming. *Here,* Baba Yaga had said, her foxy eyes glittering. She had set a burnt, black skull in the girl's chapped hands. Its eyeholes glowed like red embers. *Leave,* the witch said. Vassilissa fled, the forest black and twisted around her, the ice crunching beneath her feet. Thorns tore her clothes and roots tripped her, and the chill numbed her face. She ran, clutching the skull, the bone cold and smooth to her fingers, a pain in her side from the exertion. She did not dare let go of the skull and press a hand to her ribs.

She let a finished length of cloth slither to the ground, and began to prepare the loom to weave another. The careless folds of cloth glimmered faintly on the shadowed floor. The old woman came forward hesitantly, darting glances at the abandoned cloth. The girl wove; the rising sun sparkled gold in her eyes and glossed her dark hair with rich highlights. The old woman snatched the cloth up and scuttled to the window. She held it up to the sun, her gnarled fingers twisting in the fabric. "Beautiful..." she murmured, her voice full of little gasps, and crackly and rough; she could never get enough air to breathe anymore. She shot a crafty look at Vassilissa, her great-niece's head bent over the glittering loom; then, carefully folding the length of cloth in half, then half again, she laid it over her arm, and crept out the door.

Oh, cried the skull with mock pity, *you have lost the fire.* Its sockets burned crimson.

The shuttle skimmed over the loom, fleeing her fingers, seeking them, a momentary dullness over the flaming threads. A shadow fled with it, like a frightened bird.

She answered the skull lifelessly. "There is always more."

Fire had run up the edges of the hut's walls, four thin, precise lines. *Open the door,* she had shouted breathlessly. *I have the fire, open the door.* The bolt was unbarred; the door opened a crack. One of her step-sisters peered out; Vassilissa could not tell to whom belonged the thin, white face with its suspicious, dark eyes. They widened with surprise. *Why, Vassilissa, what's that in your hands?* The step-sister stepped back, opened the door further, to let Vassilissa in. *It's burning...*

Marissa sat in a corner, knitting. The long silver needles gleamed ruddily, in the light of the skull's eyes. Ivorna peered at Vassilissa's hands warily, and Marissa looked up, startled first, then malicious, her mouth curling with the beginnings of some insult; but her eyes went wide with horror, meeting the eyes of the skull, and she burst into flame. Fire beat a path up the corners of the hut, across the sides, and Ivorna and Marissa were both burning, screaming...

Vassilissa dropped the skull. It rolled across the floor, shrieking with laughter, fire burning in its wake. *No,* she whispered. *Oh, no.* She backed away, shaking her head, swallowing; she held her hands out, defensively, to keep the fire from her. The fire reflected in her wide eyes: the pupils had swallowed the irises. *No.* They *screamed* so... She broke away, running, her hands over her ears.

The villagers, attracted by the fire, found her in the woods the next morning, with her hair loose and tangled around her shoulders and her hands bloodied by thorns. She would not speak to anyone. The villagers took her to her great-aunt's house, passing the remains of the hut. It was all rubble and greasy, dark gray ash, except for two rubies hidden among the heavy flakes of ash. Only Vassilissa saw a thin, sullen-faced boy find the jewels; he hid them in his pockets, and ran away the next afternoon. No one knew what had become of him, or particularly cared: he had been, like Vassilissa, an orphan. *The rubies had been filled with a smouldering, bloody light, like the sockets of the skull.*

She finished another length of cloth. The dark blue, glowing light of early evening illuminated the crude interior of the hut. The cloth settled onto the floor, fold by fold. The shuttle flew across the loom.

The old woman slipped into the hut; her shadow stretched before her, thin and snaky. "Vassilissa," the old woman whispered, tugging at her sleeve. "Vassilissa, I took your cloth to the King."

Beneath her fingers, the cloth had a rivulet of palest yellow, among the flaring, heavy reds and oranges. The skull watched silently, grinning, its eyes aflame.

"He wants to see you," whispered her great-aunt. Her thin fingers trembled on Vassilissa's sleeve. "He is coming. He wants to see the cloth's weaver."

Even kings burn, the skull said. Its shadowed eyes seemed to have Baba Yaga's slitted pupils within glowing red irises.

My step-sisters are cruel to me, she had said to those glowing eyes, with the pupils that held all the world's starless nights, their irises sometimes ruby, and others dark, and others yellow-green witch-glow. *I hate them.*

Do you want them to die? Baba Yaga asked. Her eyes glittered, cruel and elfish.

An answer rose to Vassilissa's lips. She shut her teeth on it and swallowed, and said, when she could speak, *No.*

Here, Baba Yaga said. There was a darkness and a red smouldering in her hands.

A shadow fell between Vassilissa and the loom. She looked into a fine-boned face, in which age had tautened the skin, stretching it tightly over the bones; a gold circlet bound the white hair, and the dark eyes were shrewd and willful.

"She is beautiful," the King said.

"My lord--" The old woman's voice quavered, and she blinked rapidly, her eyes filmed with fear. "My lord, she is mad."

"I will take her to wife," the King said.

"She has no dowry."

"She has fine cloth."

"Cloth of fire," Vassilissa whispered.

The King frowned. "There is no fire."

There is always fire, the skull muttered from its corner. Its jaw clacked; its red eyes gleamed.

The King led her outside, put his hands to her waist, lifted her to a fine white horse; the skull grinned up at her from a pile of rocks. Her hands were palm-up as the King gently wound the reins through her fingers; her bones, afire, illuminated her flesh.

I go where you go, the skull said.

Vassilissa repeated, dutifully: "There is always fire."❧

SATANIC, VERSUS . . .

by Mercedes Lackey

A Diana Tregarde Story

* * * * * *

"Mrs. Peel," intoned a suave, urbane tenor voice from the hotel doorway behind Di Tregarde. "We're needed."

The accent was faintly French rather than English, but the inflection was dead-on.

Di didn't bother to look in the mirror, although she knew there *would* be a reflection there. Andre LeBrel might be a 200-year-old vampire, but he cast a perfectly good reflection. She was busy trying to get her false eyelashes to stick.

"In a minute, lover. The glue won't hold. I can't understand it—I bought the stuff last year for that unicorn costume and it was fine then—"

"Allow me." A thin, graceful hand appeared over her shoulder, holding a tiny tube of surgical adhesive. "I had the sinking feeling that you would forget. This glue, *cherie*, it does not age well."

"Piffle. Figure a back-stage haunt would know that." She took the white plastic tube from Andre, and proceeded to attach the pesky lashes properly. This time they obliged by staying put. She finished her preparations with a quick application of liner, and spun around to face her partner. "Here," she said, posing, feeling more than a little smug about how well the black leather jumpsuit fit. "How do I look?"

Andre cocked his bowler to the side and leaned on his umbrella. "Ravishing. And I?" His dark eyes twinkled merrily.

Although he looked a great deal more like Timothy Dalton than Patrick McNee, anyone seeing the two of them together would have no doubt who he was supposed to be costumed as. Di was very glad they had a "pair" costume, and blessed Andre's infatuation with old TV shows.

And they are going to see us together all the time, Di told herself firmly. *Why I ever agreed to this fiasco . . .*

"You look altogether too good to make me feel comfortable," she told him, snapping off the light over the mirror. "I hope you realize what you're letting yourself in for. You're going to think you're a drumstick in a pool of piranha."

Andre made a face as he followed her into the hotel room from the dressing alcove. "*Cherie*, these are only romance writers. They—"

"Are for the most part over-imaginative middle-aged *hausfraus*, married to guys that are growing thin on top and thick on the bottom, and you're likely going to be one of a handful of males in the room. And the rest are going to be middle-aged copies of their husbands, agents, or gay." She raised an eyebrow at him. "So where do you think that leaves you?"

"Like Old Man Kangaroo, very much run after." He had the audacity to laugh at her. "Have no fear, *cherie*. I shall evade the sharp little piranha teeth."

"I just hope *I* can," she muttered under her breath. Under most circumstances she avoided Romance Writers of the World functions like the plague, chucked the newsletter in the garbage without reading it, and paid her dues only because Morrie pointed out that it would look really strange if she didn't belong. The RWW, she found, was a hotbed of infighting and jealousy, and "my advances are bigger than your advances, so I am writing Deathless Prose and you are writing tripe." The general attitude seemed to be, "the publishers are out to get you, the agents are out to get you, and your fellow writers are out to get you." Since Di got along perfectly well with agent and publishers, and really didn't *care* how well or how poorly other writers were doing, she didn't see the point.

But somehow Morrie had talked her into attending the RWW Halloween party. And for the life of her, she couldn't remember why or how.

"Why am I doing this?" she asked Andre, as she snatched up her purse from the beige-draped bed, transferred everything really necessary into a black-leather belt-pouch, and slung the latter around her hips, making very sure the belt didn't interfere with the holster on her other hip. "You were the one who talked to Morrie on the phone."

"Because *M'sieur* Morrie wishes you to give his client Robert Harrison someone to talk to," the vampire reminded her. "*M'sieur* Harrison agreed to escort Valentine Vervain to the party in a moment of weakness equal to yours."

"Why in Hades did he agree to *that?*" she exclaimed, giving the sable-haired vampire a look of profound astonishment.

"Because Miss Vervain—*cherie*, that is not her real name, is it?—is one of Morrie's best clients, is newly divorced and alone, and Morrie claims most insecure, and *M'sieur* Harrison was kind to her," Andre replied.

Di took a quick look around the hotel room, to make sure she hadn't forgotten anything. One thing about combining her annual "make nice with the publishers" trip with Halloween, she had a chance to get together with all her old New York buddies for a *real* Samhain celebration, and avoid the Christmas and Thanksgiving crowds and bad weather. "I remember. That was when she did that crossover thing, and the s-f people took her apart for trying to claim it was the best thing since Tolkien." She chuckled heartlessly. "The less said about that, the better. Her magic system had holes I could drive a Mack truck through. But Harrison was a gentleman and kept the

bloodshed to a minimum. But Morrie doesn't know Valentine—and no, sexy, her name used to be Edith Bowman until she changed it legally—if he thinks she's as insecure as she's acting. Three quarters of what La Valentine does is an act. And everything is in Technicolor and Dolby-enhanced sound. So what's Harrison doing in town?"

She snatched up the key from the desk, and stuffed it into the pouch, as Andre held the door open for her.

"I do not know," he replied, twirling the umbrella once and waving her past. "You should ask him."

"I hope Valentine doesn't eat him alive," she said, striding down the beige hall, and frankly enjoying the appreciative look a hotel room-service clerk gave her as she sauntered by. "I wonder if she's going to wear the outfit from the cover of her last book—if she does, Harrison may decide he wants to spend the rest of the party in the men's room." She reached the end of the hall a fraction of a second before Andre, and punched the button for the elevator.

"I gather that is what we are to save him from, *cherie*," Andre pointed out wryly, as the elevator arrived.

"Oh well," she sighed, stepping into the mirror-walled cubicle. "It's only five hours, and it can't be that bad. How much trouble can a bunch of romance writers get into, anyway?"

There was enough lace, chiffon, and satin to outfit an entire Busby Berkeley musical. Di counted fifteen Harem Girls, nine Vampire Victims, three Southern Belles (the South was Out this year), a round dozen Ravished Maidens of var-

Satanic, Versus...

ious time periods (none of them peasants) and assorted Frills and Furbelows, and one "witch" in a black chiffon outfit clearly purchased from the *Frederick's* catalog. Aside from the "witch," she and Andre were the only ones dressed in black—and they were the only ones covered from neck to toes—though in Di's case, that was problematical; the tight black leather jumpsuit really didn't leave anything to the imagination.

The Avengers outfits had been Andre's idea, when she realized she really had agreed to go to this party. She had suggested Dracula for him and a witch for her—but he had pointed out, logically, that there was no point in coming as what they really were.

Besides, I've always wanted to get a black leather jumpsuit, and this made a good excuse to get it. And since I'm doing this as a favor to Morrie, I might be able to deduct it .

And even if I can't, the looks I'm getting are worth twice the price.

Most of the women here—and as she'd warned Andre, the suite at the Henley Palace that RWW had rented for this bash contained about eighty percent women—were in their forties at best. Most of them demonstrated amply the problems with having a sedentary job. And most of them were wearing outfits that might have been worn by their favorite heroines; though few of them went to the extent that Valentine Vervain did, of copying the exact dress from the cover of her latest book. The problem was, their heroines were all no older than twenty-two, and as described, weighed maybe ninety-five pounds. Since a great many of the ladies in question weighed at least half again that, the results were not what the wearers intended.

The sour looks Di was getting were just as flattering as the wolf-whistle the bellboy had sent her way.

A quick sail through the five rooms of the suite with Andre at her side ascertained that Valentine and her escort had not yet arrived. A quick glance at Andre's face proved that he was having a very difficult time restraining his mirth. She decided then that discretion was definitely the better part of valor, and retired to the balcony with Andre and a couple of glasses of Perrier.

It was a beautiful night; one of those rare, late-October nights that made Di regret—briefly—moving to Connecticut. Clear, cool and crisp, with just enough wind to sweep the effluvium of city life from the streets. Below them, hundreds of lights created a jewelbox effect. If you looked hard, you could even see a few stars beyond the light-haze.

The sliding glass door to the balcony had been opened to vent some of the heat and overwhelming perfume (Di's nose said, nothing under a hundred dollars a bottle), and Di left it that way. She parked her elbows on the balcony railing, looked down, and sighed.

Andre chuckled. "You warned me, and I did not believe. I apologize, *cherie*. It is—most remarkable."

"Hmm. Exercise that vampiric hearing of yours, and you'll get an earful," she said, watching the car lights crawl by, twenty stories below. "When they aren't slaughtering each other and playing little power-trip games, they're picking apart their agents and their editors. If you've ever wondered why I've never bothered going after the big money, it's because to get it I'd have to play by those rules."

"Then I devoutly urge you to remain with the modest ambitions, *cherie*," he said, fervently. "I—"

"Excuse me?" said a masculine voice from the balcony door. It had a distinct note of desperation in it. "Are you Diana Tregarde?"

Di turned. Behind her, peering around the edge of the doorway, was a harried-looking fellow in a baggy, tweedy sweater and slacks—not a costume—with a shock of prematurely graying, sandy-brown hair, glasses and a moustache. And a look of absolute misery.

"Robert Harrison, I presume?" she said, archly. "Come, join us in the sanctuary. It's too cold out here for chiffon."

"Thank God." Harrison ducked onto the balcony with the agility of a man evading Iraqi border-guards, and threw himself down in an aluminum patio chair out of sight of the windows. "I think the password is, 'Morrie sent me.'"

"Recognized; pass, friend. Give the man credit; he gave you an ally and an escape-route," Di chuckled. "Don't tell me; she showed up as the Sacred Priestess Askenazy."

"In a nine-foot chiffon train and see-through harem pants, yes," Harrison groaned. "And let me know I was Out of the Royal Favor for not dressing as What's-His-Name."

"Watirion," Di said helpfully. "Do you realize you can pronounce that as 'what-tire-iron'? I encourage the notion."

"But that wasn't the worst of it!" Harrison shook his head, distractedly, as if somewhat in a daze. "The worst was the monologue in the cab on the way over here. Every other word was Crystal this and Vibration that, Past Life Regression, and Mystic Rituals. The woman's a whoopie witch!"

Di blinked. That was a new one on her. "A what?"

Harrison looked up, and for the first time, seemed to see her. "Uh—" he hesitated. "Uh, some of what Morrie said—uh, he seemed to think you—well, you've seen things—uh, he said you know things—"

She fished the pentagram out from under the neck of her jumpsuit and flashed it briefly. "My religion is non-traditional, yes, and there are more things in heaven and earth, etcetera. Now what in Tophet is a whoopie witch?"

"It's—uh—a term some friends of mine use. It's kind of hard to explain." Harrison's brow furrowed. "Look, let me give you examples. Real witches have *grimoires*, sometimes handed down through their families for centuries. Whoopie witches have books they picked up at the supermarket. Usually right at the check-out counter."

"Real witches have carefully researched spells—" Di prompted.

"Whoopie witches draw a baseball diamond in chalk on the living room floor and recite random passages from the *Satanic Bible*."

"When real witches make substitutions, they do so knowing the exact differences the substitute will make—"

"Whoopie witches slop taco sauce in their pentagram because it looks like blood."

"Real witches gather their ingredients by hand—" Di was beginning to enjoy this game.

"Whoopie witches have a credit card, and lots of catalogues." Harrison was grinning, and so was Andre.

"Real witches spend hours in meditation--"

"Whoopie witches sit under a pyramid they ordered from a catalogue and watch *Knott's Landing*."

"Real witches cast spells knowing that any change they make in someone's life will come back at them three-fold, for good or ill—"

"Whoopie witches call up the Hideous Slime from Yosotha to eat their neighbor's poodle because the bitch got the last carton of Haagen-Dasz double-chocolate at the Seven-Eleven."

"I think I've got the picture. So dear Val decided to take the so-called research she did for the Great Fantasy Novel seriously?" Di leaned back into the railing and laughed. "Oh, Robert, I pity you! Did she try to tell you that the two of you just *must* have been priestly lovers in a past life in Atlantis?"

"Lemuria," Harrison said, gloomily. "My God, she must be supporting half the crystal miners in Arkansas."

"Don't feel too sorry for her, Robert,"

Di warned him. "With her advances, she can afford it. And I know some perfectly nice people in Arkansas who should only soak her for every penny they can get. Change the subject; you're safe with us—and if she decides to hit the punch-bowl hard enough, you can send her back to her hotel in a cab and she'll never know the difference. What brings you to New York?"

"Morrie wants me to meet the new editors at Berkley; he thinks I've got a shot at selling them that near-space series I've been dying to do. And I had some people here in the City I really needed to see." He sighed. "And, I'll admit it, I'd been thinking about writing bodice-rippers under a pseudonym. When you know they're getting ten times what I am—"

Di shrugged. "I don't think you'd be happy doing it, unless you've written strictly to spec before. There are a lot of things you have to conform to that you might not feel comfortable doing. Listen, Harrison, you seem to know quite a bit about hot-and-cold-running esoterica—how did you—?"

Someone inside one of the other rooms screamed. Not the angry scream of a woman who had been insulted, but the soul-chilling shriek of pure terror that brands itself on the air and stops all conversation dead.

"What in—?" Harrison was on his feet, staring in the direction of the scream. Di ignored him and launched herself at the patio door, pulling the Glock-19 from the holster on her hip, and thankful she'd loaded silver-tipped bullets in the first clip.

Funny how everybody thought it couldn't be real because it was plastic . . .

"Andre—the next balcony!" she called over her shoulder, knowing the vampire could easily scramble over the concrete divider and come in through the next patio door, giving them a two-pronged angle of attack.

The scream hadn't been what alerted her—simultaneous with the scream had been the wrenching feeling in her gut that was the signal that someone had breached the fabric of the Otherworld in her presence. She didn't know who, or what—but from the stream of panicked chiffon billowing towards the door at supersonic speed, it probably wasn't nice, and it probably had a great deal to do with one of the party-goers.

Three amply-endowed females (one Belle, one Ravished, one Harem) had reached the door to the next room at the same moment, and jammed it, and rather than one of them pulling free, all three kept shoving harder, shrieking at the tops of their lungs in tones their agents surely recognized.

You'd think their advances failed to pay out! Di kept the Glock in her hand, but sprinted for the door. She grabbed the nearest flailing arm (Harem), planted her foot in the midsection of her neighbor (Belle), and shoved and pulled at the same time. The clot of feminine hysteria came loose with a sound of ripping cloth as a crinoline parted company with its wearer. The three women tumbled through the door, giving Di a clear launching path into the next room. She took it, diving for the shelter of a huge wooden coffee table, rolling, and aiming for the door of the last room with the Glock. And her elbow hit someone.

"What are you doing here?" asked Harrison, and Di, simultaneously. Harrison cowered—no, had taken cover, there was a distinct difference—behind the sofa, beside the coffee table, his own huge Magnum aimed at the same doorway.

"My job," they said—also simultaneously.

"What?" (Again in chorus).

"This is all a very amusing study in synchronicity," said Andre, crouching just behind Harrison, bowler tipped, the sword from his umbrella out and ready. "But I suggest you both pay attention to that most boorish party-crasher over there—"

Something very large occluded the light for a moment in the next room. Then the lights went out, and Di distinctly heard the sound of the chandelier being torn from the ceiling and thrown against the wall. Di winced. *There go my dues up again.*

"I got a glimpse," Andre continued. "It was very large, perhaps ten feet tall, and—*cherie,* it looked like nothing so much as a rubber creature from a very bad movie. Except that I do *not* think it was rubber."

At just that moment, there was a thrashing from the other room, and Valentine Vervain, long red hair liberally beslimed, minus nine-foot train and one of her sleeves, scrambled through the door and plastered herself against the wall, where she promptly passed out.

"Valentine?" Di murmured—and snapped her head towards Harrison when he moaned, "Oh, no," in a way that made her sure he knew something.

There was a sound of things breaking in the other room, as if something was fumbling around in the dark, picking up whatever it encountered, and smashing it in frustration.

"Harrison!" she snapped. "Cough it up!"

"Valentine—she said something about getting some of her 'friends' together tonight and 'calling up her soul-mate' so she could 'show that ex of hers.' I gather he appeared at the divorce hearing with a twenty-one year old blonde." Harrison gulped. "I figured she was just blowing it off—I never thought she had any power—"

"You'd be amazed what anger will do," Di replied grimly, keeping her eyes on the darkened doorway. "Sometimes it even transcends a total lack of talent. Put that together with the time of year—All Hallow's Eve—*Samhain* ---is tomorrow. The Wall Between the Worlds is especially thin, and power flows are heavy right now. A recipe for disaster if I ever heard one."

"And here comes *M'sieur* Soul-Mate," said Andre, warningly.

What shambled in through the door was like nothing that Di had ever heard of. It was, indeed, about ten feet tall. It was a very dark brown. It was covered with luxuriant brown hair—all over. Otherwise, it was nude. If there were any eyes, the hair hid them completely. It was built something along the lines of a powerful body-builder, taken to exaggerated proportions, and it drooled. It also stank, a combination of sulphur and musk so strong it would have brought tears to the eyes of a skunk.

"Wah-wen-ine!" it bawled, waving its arms around, as if it were blind. "Wah-wen-ine!"

"Oh goddess," Di groaned, putting two and two together. *She called up a soul-mate, and specified parameters. But she forgot to specify 'human'.* "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

The other writer nodded. "Tall, check. Dark, check. Long hair, check. Handsome—well, I suppose in some circles." Harrison stared at the thing in fascination.

"Some—*thing*—that will accept her completely as she is, and love her completely. Young, sure, he can't be more than five minutes old." Di watched the thing fumble for the doorframe and cling to it. "Look at that, he can't see. So love *is* blind. Strong and masculine as you can get. And not too bright, which I bet she also specified. Oh, my ears and whiskers."

Valentine came to, saw the thing, and screamed.

"Wah-wen-ine!" it howled, and lunged for her. Reflexively, Di and Harrison both shot. He emptied his cylinder, and one speed-loader; Di gave up after four shots, when it was obvious they *were* hitting the thing, to no effect.

Valentine scrambled on hands and knees over the carpet, still screaming—but crawling in the wrong direction, towards the balcony, not the door.

"*Merde!*" Andre flung himself between the creature's clutching hands and its summoner, before Di could do anything.

And before Di could react to that, the thing backhanded him into a wall hard enough to put him through the plasterboard.

Valentine passed out again. Andre was already out for the count. There are some things even a vampire has a little trouble recovering from.

"Jesus!" Harrison was on his feet, fumbling for something in his pocket. Di joined him, holstering the Glock, and grabbed his arm.

"Harrison, distract it, make a noise, anything!" She pulled the athame from her boot sheath and began cutting sigils in the air with it, getting the Words of Dismissal out as fast as she could without slurring the syllables.

Harrison didn't even hesitate; he grabbed a couple of tin serving trays from the coffee table, shook off their contents, and banged them together.

The thing turned its head toward him, its hands just inches away from its goal. "Wah-wen-ine?" it said.

Harrison banged the trays again. It lunged toward the sound. It was a lot faster than Di had thought.

Evidently Harrison made the same error in judgment. It missed him by inches, and he scrambled out of the way by the width of a hair, just as Di concluded the Ritual of Dismissal.

To no effect.

"Hurry up, will you?" Harrison yelped, as the thing threw the couch into the wall and lunged again.

"I'm trying!" she replied through clenched teeth—though not loud enough to distract the thing, which had concluded that either **(a)** Harrison *was* Valentine or **(b)** Harrison was keeping it from Valentine. Whichever, it had gone from wailing Valentine's name to simply wailing, and lunging after Harrison, who was dodging with commendable agility for a man of middle age.

Of course, he had a lot of incentive.

She tried three more dismissals, still with no effect. The room was trashed, and Harrison was getting winded, and running out of heavy, expensive things to throw . . .

And the only thing she could think of was the "incantation" she used—as a joke—to make the stoplights change in her favor.

Oh well. A cockamamie incantation pulled it up— "By the Seven Rings of Zsa Zsa Gabor and the Rock of Elizabeth Taylor I command thee!" she shouted, stepping between the thing and Harrison (who was beginning to stumble). "By the Six Wives of Eddie Fisher and the Words of Karnak the Great I compel thee! Freeze, buddy!"

Power rose through her, crested over her—and hit the thing. And the thing—stopped. It whimpered, and struggled a little against invisible bonds, but seemed unable to move.

Harrison dropped to the carpet, right on top of a spill of guacamole and ground-in tortilla chips, whimpering a little himself.

I have to get rid of this thing, quick, before it breaks the compulsion— She closed her eyes, trusted to instinct, and shouted the first thing that came into her mind. The Parking Ritual, with one change . . .

"Great Squat, send him to a spot, and I'll send you three nuns—"

Mage-energies raged through the room, whirling about her, invisible, intangible to eyes and ears, but she felt them. She was the heart of the whirlwind, she and the other—

There was a *pop* of displaced air. She opened her eyes to see that the creature was gone—but the mage-energies continued to whirl—faster—

"Je-sus," said Harrison. "How did you—?"

She waved frantically to silence him as the energies sensed his presence and began to circle in on him.

"Great Squat, thanks for the spot!" she yelled, desperately, trying to complete the incantation before Harrison could be pulled in. "Your nuns are in the mail!"

The energies swirled up and away, satisfied. Andre groaned, stirred, and began extracting himself from the powdered sheet-rock wall. Harrison stumbled over to give him a hand.

Just as someone pounded on the outer door of the suite.

"Police!" came a muffled voice. "Open the door!"

"It's open!" Di yelled back, unzipping her belt-pouch and pulling out her wallet.

Three people—two uniformed NYCPD, and one fellow in a suit with an impressive .357 Magnum in his hand—peered cautiously into the room.

"Jee-zus Christ," one said in awe.

"Who?" the dazed Valentine murmured, hand hanging limply over her forehead. "What hap . . . ?"

Andre appeared beside Di, bowler in hand, umbrella spotless, innocent-looking again.

Di fished her Hartford PD Special OP's ID out of her wallet and handed it to the man in the suit. "This lady," she said angrily, pointing to Valentine, "played a little Halloween joke that got out of hand. Her accomplices went out the back door, then down the fire escape. If you hurry you might be able to catch them."

The two NYCPD officers looked around at the destruction, and didn't seem any too inclined to chase after whoever was responsible. Di checked out of the corner of her eye; Harrison's own .44 had vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared.

"Are you certain this woman is responsible?" asked the hard-faced, suited individual with a frown, as he holstered his .357. He wasn't paying much attention to the plastic handgrip in the holster at Di's hip, for which she was grateful.

House detective, I bet. With any luck, he's never seen a Glock.

Di nodded. "These two gentlemen will back me up as witnesses," she said. "I suspect some of the ladies from the party will be able to do so as well, once you explain that Ms. Vervain was playing a not-very-nice joke on them. Personally, I think she ought to be held accountable for the damages."

And keep my RWW dues from going through the roof.

"Well, I think so too, miss." The detective hauled Valentine ungently to her feet. The writer was still confused, and it wasn't an act this time. "Ma'am," he said sternly to the dazed redhead, "I think you'd better come with me. I think we have a few questions to ask you."

Di projected outraged innocence and harmlessness at them as hard as she could. The camouflage trick worked, which after this evening, was more than she had expected. The two uniformed officers didn't even look at her weapon; they just followed the detective out, without a single backwards glance.

Harrison cleared his throat, audibly. She turned and raised an eyebrow at him.

"You—I thought you were just a writer—"

"And I thought *you* were just a writer," she countered. "So we're even."

"But—" He took a good look at her face, and evidently thought better of prying. "What did you do with that—thing? That was the strangest incantation I've ever heard!"

She shrugged, and began picking her way through the mess of smashed furniture, spilled drinks, and crushed and ground-in refreshments. "I have no idea. Valentine brought it in with something screwy, I got rid of it the same way. And that critter has no idea how lucky he was."

"Why?" asked Harrison, as she and Andre reached the door.

"Why?" She turned and smiled sweetly. "Do you have any idea how hard it is to get a parking place in Manhattan at this time of night?" ❧

Author's Note: The character of Robert Harrison and the concept of "whoopie witches" was taken from the supernatural role-playing game, *Stalking the Night Fantastic*, by Richard Tucholka, and used with the creator's permission.

Leave your world,

and enter ours.

ADMIT ONE

GOOD FOR ONE SUBSCRIPTION to Marion Zimmer Bradley's ***Fantasy Magazine***. Please enclose $14.00 for the first year ($20.00 Canadian, $30.00 Foreign) WELCOME to fantastic flights of fantasy!!

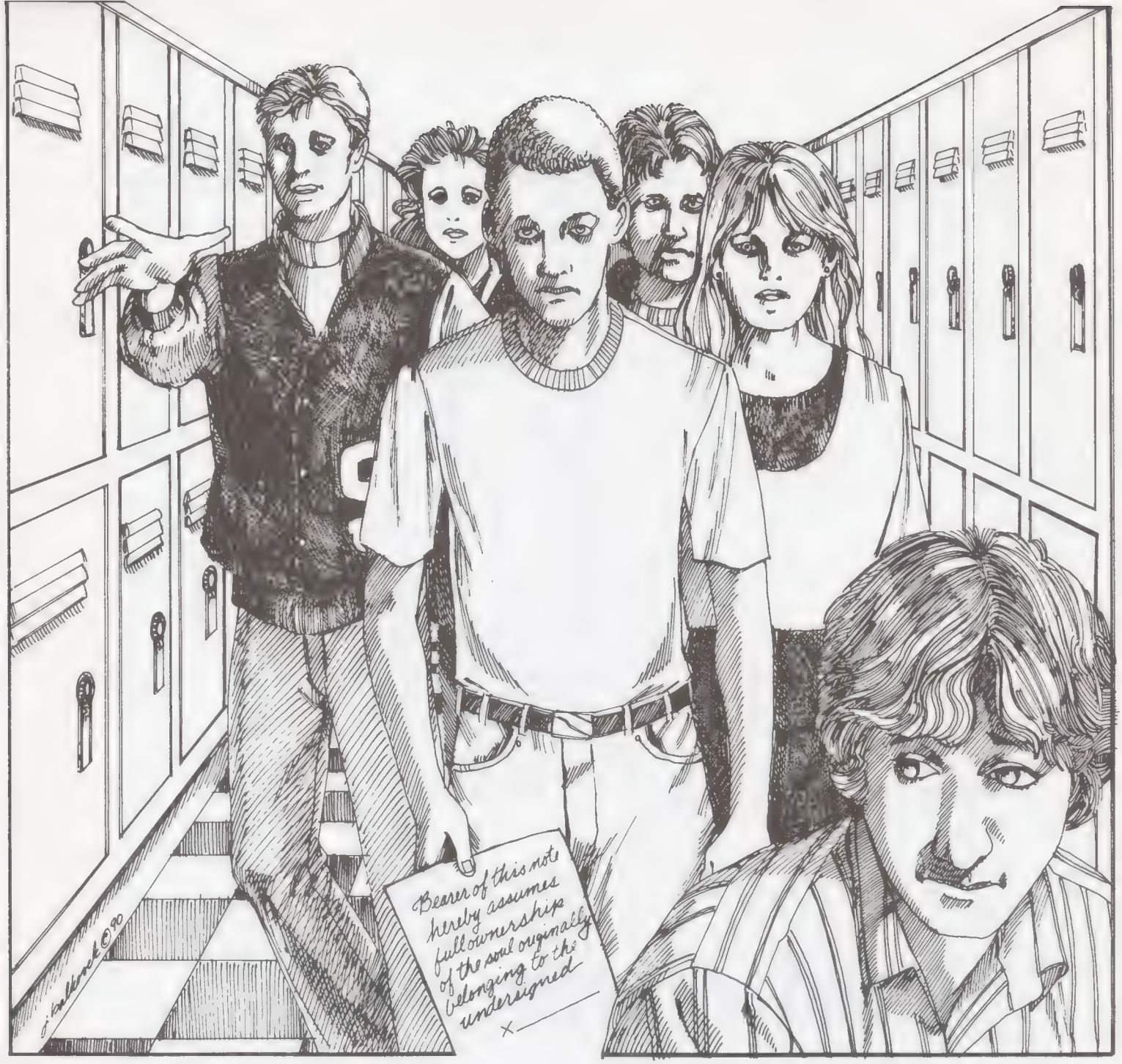
Name

Street

City, State, Postal Code

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Fantasy Magazine*

P.O. Box 11095, Oakland, CA 94611-9991



A Dollar for Your Soul

by Earl Vickers

George's latest theory concerned human corruptibility.

"Everyone has a price," he claimed, "and the price is usually quite affordable."

I knew laughing would just encourage him. "Yeah, but not everyone," I argued.

"Sure, because everyone has some weak point." He paused, staring me in the eye. "It's just a matter of finding the weakness and exploiting it."

I felt a cold draft from the air conditioner. The librarian was giving us a nasty look. "So what are you saying?" I whispered.

"I'm saying if someone hasn't already sold out on everything they ever believed in, it's just because they haven't been given the right opportunity. I bet in a week's time a person could get every single kid in eleventh grade to sell their soul."

This time I laughed. "Well, if anyone could, it would be you, George."

"You know, I think you're right! What a great idea!"

"What? You're going to go around buying peoples' souls?"

"Sure, why not? I'll corner the market--the entire junior class. By next Friday." George thought for a moment. "Yeah, I bet I could do it."

"No way."

"Fine. Let's have a little wager. If I win, it proves my theory is right, that everyone is corruptible. If you win, I'll freely admit I was wrong."

"That would be a first," I said.

"Indeed."

I'd never known George to lose a bet, but there was no way he could win this one. He might get two or three souls--he did have an exceptional eye for defects in another person's character. But every single kid in eleventh grade? In one week? I, for one, had no intention of selling my soul to anyone, for any price.

I agreed to the wager.

Over the weekend, George printed up a batch of very official-looking soul-transfer forms. I watched him in action on Monday morning.

"Think of it as free money. Sign your name, get a dollar. It's that simple."

Mark Sommerfield took one of the forms and read it.

"'The bearer of this note hereby assumes full ownership of the soul originally belonging to the undersigned." He paused. "I don't get it. What do you want with our souls?"

"It's just a hobby," said George. "Like collecting stamps, or coins, or beer cans."

"Yeah, but this is different," said Mark. "I mean, don't you think my soul's worth more than a beer can?"

"Depends," said George.

"You could at least make it ten bucks."

"You know, that's the beauty of our free-enterprise system. If you can get ten dollars--or a million--somewhere else, be my guest. But I think you'll find the current exchange rate is... well, let me double-check." George pulled out his calculator and did a few quick computations. "Yes, the soul is trading at one dollar even."

Mark tried for a dollar and a half but finally gave in.

"Okay, one dollar. But I still think it's worth more than that." He hesitated. "I don't have to sign in blood or anything, do I?"

"Not necessary," George replied, removing a four-color pen from his shirt pocket. "A mere formality from the past. Ink is perfectly acceptable, though of course... red is preferred."

George clicked the red button on his pen and handed it to Mark. Mark signed the transfer-of-ownership form and received his dollar.

George got half a dozen more souls before second period, but lots of other kids turned him down.

I saw him again at lunch. The word had spread, and now he had people crowded all around him. Some of them wanted to prove how fearless or free-thinking they were. Others took his offer as a joke, and they were happy to play along. They figured the contract couldn't be legally binding. And for many, the motivation was simply to get their free dollars before the money ran out.

Billy Schoenwetter walked over to George's lunch table. George always called him Billy Bedwetter. Billy was shy, awkward, and not real bright. He would do anything to be part of the group.

"Will you buy my soul?" he asked, in his usual quavery, crackly voice.

"You don't have a soul," said George, "and if you did I wouldn't buy it."

Billy got all upset. "I do too have a soul."

"Prove it."

Billy looked confused. The other kids were trying not to laugh out loud.

"Well?" demanded George.

"I do too have a soul," repeated Billy.

"I doubt it. And even if you did, I wouldn't take it if you paid me."

"Yes you would."

"Get lost."

Billy looked as if he were about to cry. He took a dollar bill out of his wallet, wadded it up and threw it at George.

"There. Where do I sign?"

"Look," said George, straightening out the dollar, "I have to be selective. I can't just buy every soul that comes along."

"How much?" asked Billy.

"Five bucks."

Billy looked in his wallet. "I only got three."

George sighed. "Fine. Give me what you have and bring the rest tomorrow."

Billy gratefully assured George that he would bring the money first thing in the morning. He proudly signed the transfer form and showed it to George.

"See, I really do have a soul," he said.

George took the form and corrected Billy's grammar. "*Did*. Past tense." Billy looked confused again.

George's business was booming now. It had become the new fad. But lots of kids still thought it was disgusting and wouldn't sell for anything.

After school, I met George on the front steps. He opened his briefcase and showed me all the forms.

"I gave Ray two dollars for his," said George. "I figured a black guy has more soul."

I shook my head. "Where'd you get all the money, anyway?"

"Oh, I told my dad I was running a small start-up company, so he lent me fifty bucks in venture capital. I've already spent most of it," he said. "I think I've got about all of the easy souls."

"So how are you going to get the rest?"

"I don't know. But I'll think of something."

Tuesday morning before school, a large crowd of students gathered, waiting for George. These were the same kids who had dealt with him the day before.

They were talking about what horrible dreams they'd had all night. They said they didn't know it was going to be like this. George entered the building and was immediately surrounded.

"We've changed our minds," said Beth Reinhart. "We want our souls back."

"A deal is a deal," insisted George. "You should've thought of this before. I'm sure in time you'll get used to it. Lots of people don't have souls."

They didn't think they'd get used to it. Ever. They tried to describe the horror, the desperation, the guilt, the sense of loss. They tried pleading, begging, threatening.

"Give me back my soul," said Paul Chamberlin, "or I'm going to the principal."

There was an uneasy silence.

"Well, do what you want," said George, "but you'll get in trouble too. After all, what kind of person would sell his immortal soul for a dollar? And what if your parents found out? What would they think?"

Paul backed off. "Okay, okay. I won't turn you in. At least not right now. But I still want my soul back."

George suggested they all just keep quiet and let him think about it. They reluctantly agreed.

George sat in the back at first period English. His leg was nervously bouncing up and down, shaking the floor, vibrating the whole room. Suddenly his face flashed a familiar grin. I could tell I was witnessing the birth of a great and revolting new idea.

After class, George was again mobbed by kids without souls.

"Okay," he said. "I've reconsidered. You can have your souls back"---their eyes lit up---"for ten dollars... and three more souls." His offer was met with shock and disbelief, as the implications gradually sank in.

"And," he continued, "the three additional souls must be from our class, at

A Dollar for Your Soul

least until eleventh grade is all sold out. You might want to start with your best friends. Toward the end you'll probably need to be somewhat *creative."*

The kids lined up, took the blank soul-transfer forms, and walked away, slowly, as if in a trance. Their eyes were empty, their faces pale. I could see it beginning already: an army of zombies roaming the halls, looking for new victims. One of them, a guy I didn't even know, bumped into me by accident and asked if he could borrow my soul, just for a few minutes.

"I'll take real good care of it," he said. "Here, you can use my school I. D. for collateral."

I pushed him aside and went to have a talk with George.

"Don't you see what's happening?" I asked.

"Yeah. It's fascinating."

"But look at them! They've turned into walking, talking corpses."

"It's just their imagination," he explained. "One person wants his soul back, and suddenly they all do. It's contagious, just like the way everyone wanted to *sell* their souls yesterday."

"Yeah, it's like a disease, and you're making them spread it."

"I'm not making them do anything," said George. "I'm just giving them the opportunity. Yesterday they had a chance to prove what whores they are, and now they get to prove what pimps they are."

"So what does that make you?"

"Listen," he said, holding up one of the soul-transfer forms. "This isn't really a person's soul. It's just a piece of paper. Just like a dollar bill-- it's only worth something because people *believe* it is. I'm just trading one piece of paper for another, and the green paper's more valuable, that's all." He smiled. "I knew there had to be a way to make money at this. Buy low, sell high?!"

"And you can just sit back and watch while they do your dirty work for you."

"I call it M.Z.M.... Multi-Zombie-Marketing. Yeah, I've really outdone myself this time."

"Yeah, you sure have." I walked away.

By afternoon, the place had become a madhouse. The demand for souls was growing steadily. Rich kids offered bounties and finder's fees for information leading to the purchase of a third soul. Other kids, seeing an opportunity, moved in as middlemen: agents, brokers, bankers, scalpers, wholesalers, retailers. They thought they could profit from the turmoil without getting caught up in it. Everywhere I went, I saw poker games, purse-snatchings, lotteries, auctions-- souls begged and borrowed, bought and sold. The teachers were starting to wonder if something was going on.

The next morning, people were scrambling to buy up the souls that were left. Some of the kids were mad at me for not selling them mine.

George sat next to me for third period. While we were waiting for class to start, he told me everything that had been happening.

"I was getting my books, and Doug, the football jock, he comes over and picks me up and slams me against the lockers. Said something about wanting his soul back. I explained to him that if he ever wants to see it again, he should refrain from hurting me. In fact, he should see to it that no one else tries to hurt me either. So now I've got a bodyguard!"

"That's nice," I replied.

"And Amy's been selling her soul to everyone she can find. She's making all kinds of money, and then these kids come to me and think they're going to get their souls back, and I have to explain that I already have an Amy and theirs is a duplicate."

I didn't say anything.

"And then Roger brought in three souls and I didn't know who one of them was, so I asked him. Turned out it was his grandmother. He said she's always happy to do whatever she can to help him out with his school work. He was so upset when I told him it didn't count."

"This is all going to backfire on you, George," I said quietly. "It's not too late to call it off."

"No way."

"We can pretend like you won the bet, and you can keep all the money."

"No," said George. "Honor is at stake."

"Well, I don't think you're going to get too many more. A lot of kids have just given up. Plus they don't want to put their friends in the same situation they're in."

"Oh yeah?" George grinned. "I'll fix that."

Mr. Huffman came in and started writing on the blackboard. As usual, his trousers were covered in chalk dust. George wadded up a soul-transfer form and chewed on it for a minute. Then when it was nice and sticky he threw it so it landed on the board right next to where Huffman was writing. Huffman paused, then turned around. All eyes were on George.

"Is this yours, Mr. Foltz?" Huffman pointed at the spitball while staring George in the eye.

"No sir," said George. "I believe it belongs to Billy."

I groaned, remembering the trouble Billy had had getting George to take his soul in the first place.

"Mr. Schoenwetter, is that true?" Mr. Huffman asked.

"I... I hope not," said Billy. The other kids laughed, nervously.

"You don't know whether you threw a spitball or not?" Huffman sounded incredulous.

"Uh, no sir. I mean, yes sir, I do, but I d-d-didn't..."

"Mr. Huffman," said George, "I believe if you unwad that slip of paper, you'll find Billy's name on it."

The students laughed again.

"I have no intention of touching that disgusting thing. Mr. Schoenwetter, perhaps you would be so kind as to remove your personal property from the blackboard so we can carry on with our discussion?"

"Yes sir." Billy half-ran toward the front and retrieved the spitball. "Thank you, sir."

Huffman gave George a raised-left-eyebrow stare, then turned and went back to his writing.

Later in the day, George was occasionally seen off in a corner, playing with a cigarette lighter, burning little scraps of paper. Now the kids were more desperate than ever to get their souls back, before it was too late.

At the end of fifth period, Lisa Adams saw me on the second floor and came over and started talking to me. She was my girlfriend, sort of. She looked pale, like the other kids.

"You know that thing about people buying each others' souls the last couple of days? Well, I fell for it. I can't believe I was so stupid."

"Wow." I shook my head. "This has really gone too far. I wish there was something I could do to help."

"Well, actually, there is. See, George says he'll return it if I can just get him ten dollars and three more souls."

I took a step back.

"Oh, relax," she said. "I'm not going to ask you for money. You're too good a friend for that."

I drew back another step.

"I've already got the ten dollars, and two of the souls. I was just thinking, it would be really nice if you could--"

I turned and started walking away.

"--if you could let me have your soul."

"No!"

I walked faster. She was following me. I turned the corner and headed for the bathroom.

"I wouldn't ask you if I didn't love you!" she said.

I rushed into the boy's room. I found an empty stall and sat down. *That was close.*

But then the bathroom door swung open. "I know you're in there," she said.

Urinals were flushing and zippers were zipping. There was a chorus of protests.

"Where are you?" she sang.

She walked over and started peeking into the stalls one by one.

Her voice was getting closer. "George says it's not so bad once you get used to it."

I got out of the stall and headed toward the window. She was right behind me.

"Please! You've got to help me!"

I took one look back at her. Then I jumped out onto the first story roof and ran like hell.

I got to the end of the building and climbed down to the ground. I decided to cut my last class.

Thursday morning, everyone wanted my soul. I was the only one left. I couldn't walk down the hall without being surrounded by zombies.

I sat in the back row for third period math class. George took the empty seat next to me. He said he'd give me half the money he'd made if I'd sell him my soul. I didn't answer.

He looked around the room at the other students. "Well, if you won't sell *me* your soul, one of these goons will find a way to get you to sell."

Mr. Huffman came in. He drew a big triangle on the board and started talking about chain letters and pyramid schemes.

"These schemes are based on what is called the 'greater fool' theory," he said. "They require an ever-growing number of greater fools to pay off the previous investors. Amazingly enough, at some point you always run out of fools."

"George," I whispered, "he knows something about the souls."

"Be quiet."

"In economics we find something called deficit financing. Can anyone explain how that works?" Huffman droned on and on.

"I bet he knows about the whole thing," I whispered.

"Think so?" said George. He didn't look disturbed at all. He was listening intently, probably soaking up ideas for his next scam.

"Where else do we see this basic pyramidal structure? How about the food chain? How about nuclear fission, the population explosion, the spread of disease? Again, the same geometrical progression, the same multiplier effect..."

"George, what if he turns you in to the principal? You'll get suspended."

"Shut up. This might be important."

"No, I don't think so. He wouldn't test us on this stuff."

"How about the spread of ideas? Publishing. Broadcasting. Even teaching, on those rare occasions when anyone bothers to pay attention."

"George, he'll make you give back all the souls."

George smiled. "I don't think so," he said. He pulled a slip of paper out of his briefcase and showed it to me.

"The bearer of this note hereby assumes full ownership of the soul originally belonging to the undersigned. Sincerely, John K. Huffman."

I looked up. Huffman was staring at me. His face was chalky, ghostly, pale-- he was a zombie too. It gave me shivers.

I saw George again after school. He increased his offer, throwing in everything he could think of.

George knew me better than anyone. He knew my greeds and hungers, my fears, my dreams, my nightmares.

He tried all of them.

Finally he ran out of ideas.

"Look," he said, "I don't know what else to offer. See if you can think of something. What do you want right now, more than anything?"

I just wanted him to give everyone's souls back. I started to say something but he interrupted me.

"I know," he said excitedly. "How about if you give me your soul in exchange for all the others? Then, if you want to, you can give them all back to the original owners."

I didn't know what to say.

"Just think," said George, "you'll be the most popular kid in the class. People will look at you and say to themselves, 'He saved my soul. He sacrificed his soul for mine. What a guy!'"

"But what about *my* soul?"

"I'll treat it as if it were my very own."

"Will I ever get it back?"

George tilted his head. "Hard to say... So, is it a deal or not?"

I thought for a while. George looked at his watch a couple of times. "Okay, okay," I said. "It's a deal."

I signed the form.

"So I guess I win the bet," said George, smiling.

"Looks that way."

I put the souls in a paper bag and left for home. I went to bed early that night. I didn't sleep very well.

In the morning, I thought about charging everyone a dollar apiece to get their souls back. It was only fair that I should get something out of it. But it seemed too creepy, so I didn't.

I started giving them back for free, between classes. But no one seemed particularly grateful. Most of the kids had reached a state of total apathy. If anything, they looked at me with cold distrust, as if the whole thing were my fault. I was sorry I'd ever tried to help them.

George talked to me after History. "How many do you have left?"

I looked in the paper bag. "A dozen or so."

"I've been thinking. I feel really bad about you not having a soul of your own. ...Tell you what-- I'll give it back in exchange for any *one* of the souls you have left. I'll even let you choose which one."

What was George up to now? If he was trying to tempt me, it was working. I closed my eyes and thought for a minute.

"Look," said George. "You sacrificed part of yourself for these kids, and what did you get? Nothing."

I opened the bag and leafed through the pieces of paper, looking at the names, saying them to myself. Finally I handed over one of the forms.

"Ah, *Lisa Adams,*" he read. "Excellent choice."

Suddenly I realized what I was doing. "You won't tell her, will you?"

"No, of course not," he said, handing me my transfer form. "Here's your soul back-- it's only slightly damaged. I do hope you'll take better care of it in the future."

I folded the piece of paper and put it in my wallet. I felt better immediately, but not a lot better.

Later in the morning, I finished giving back the rest of the souls. At lunch, Lisa came over to my table and started yelling at me. She was furious.

"George says you picked me to be the only person in the whole class who doesn't get their soul back."

I didn't know what to say. I felt terrible. I didn't think George would tell.

Lisa was crying. "How could you do this to me? I thought you were my friend. Why did you have to pick *me?*"

I got up and walked out. I wasn't very hungry anyway.

In the afternoon, I cornered George and took him into an empty classroom.

"You betrayed me," I told him.

"You betrayed Lisa," he said. "I just thought someone should let her know."

A Dollar for Your Soul

"You said you wouldn't tell her!"

"I *didn't* tell her. I wrote her a note."

"You make me sick." I shook my head in disgust. "Aren't you getting bored with your little game yet?"

"Actually, yes I am," he replied. "You want to hear my latest plan?"

"No! I just want you to give Lisa's soul back."

"Forget it."

"But George, you've proven your point. You already got every single person in the eleventh grade..." I stopped for a moment. "Wait a minute, maybe not."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

I looked at George. "I just realized– you haven't won your bet after all!"

"Sure I have."

"No. Remember, the bet said *everyone* in eleventh grade had to sell."

"They have. I checked all the names. You were the last one."

"No." I pointed at George. "*You're* the last one! You haven't sold *your* soul. Tell you what– I'll give you a dollar for it."

"That wasn't part of the deal and you know it!"

"I don't recall you making any kind of exception for yourself."

"Well, no," said George. "It was just understood."

"You said *everyone* could be bought. So how about you? Would you sell your soul to win this bet?"

George glared at me. "Do I look stupid?"

"Well, then, what would you sell it for? What's your price?"

"If you have to ask, you can't afford it," he said, acting unconcerned.

Lisa walked in. Apparently she'd overheard the whole thing.

"I think the reason you won't sell your soul is because you don't have one," she said, with barely controlled rage. "Or else you wouldn't be so cruel. Maybe you've succeeded in proving that the rest of us are corruptible, but that's only because we're human, because we had souls to begin with. Unlike you."

"Hey, I have a soul. I have one right here," he laughed, waving a piece of paper.

Lisa grabbed for it. "That's not your soul, that's mine!"

"Not anymore it's not," said George, pulling the paper out of her reach. "It belongs to me, fair and square."

I got between them, to keep Lisa from beating him to a bloody pulp.

"Look, George, I've got an idea. You're saying that you're the owner of this soul, which used to be Lisa's, right?"

"Right."

"So, in a sense, this is 'your' soul, right?"

"That's right."

"And you're the only one left who hasn't sold. So if you sell this soul, which is, quote, 'yours', that'll mean everybody in eleventh grade has sold their souls. Right?"

"I guess so. Sort of."

"So if you sell it back to Lisa, you'll win your bet, and Lisa will have her soul back."

George laughed. "Do you think your logic is sufficiently twisted?"

I shrugged. "Maybe. So is it a deal?"

"Well, I've grown rather fond of this one," he said, looking at the transfer form. "But if that's what I have to do to win the bet..."

Lisa cautiously handed George a dollar with one hand and took her soul back with the other. She stared at him resentfully.

"So, George," I said, "it looks like all you've done is proven you're just as corruptible as the rest of us. You finally went and sold your soul."

"Well, it wasn't really 'my' soul," said George. "It was Lisa's."

"Oh, so now it was *my* soul," said Lisa. "So you *didn't* really sell *your* soul. Well that's too bad. I guess you lose your stupid little bet after all!"

George started mumbling something about technicalities. Lisa and I looked at each other and broke out laughing.

"Come on George, admit it. You lost and you know it."

George hesitated, then grinned. "Okay, fine. You're right. I lost. I was wrong. Not everyone is corruptible. Just everyone except me!"

Lisa shook her head, mildly amused. "Yeah, right."

Suddenly there was a loud noise, like a crash of thunder. The smell of sulfur filled the air. Lisa wrinkled up her nose and looked suspiciously at George.

"Did you just...?"

The three of us turned, to see a tall figure standing in the back of the room. He looked vaguely familiar, with large, dark eyes and a black, well-trimmed beard. He wore a grey business suit and held a briefcase identical to George's.

"Mr. Foltz," he said in a rich, resonant voice. "I've heard so much about you."

He handed George his business card, and the two of them shook hands.

"Oh," said George, "I see you're with the I.R.S."

"That's right. The *Infernal* Revenue Service."

George handed the stranger a card of his own. The engraving read, simply, *George Foltz, Soul Proprietor.*

"We've been watching you for some time," said the stranger. "I'm here to make you an offer. I think you could have a great future with our organization."

"Really?"

"Absolutely. We're very impressed with your operation, but we'd like you to consider the advantages of a merger. Why, you could double, even triple your business overnight."

George and the stranger walked slowly out of the classroom. Lisa and I looked on in horror.

"George, be careful!" I shouted.

He nodded.

"Mr. Foltz, we can offer you an exciting, challenging career. As you may know, our salaries are among the best in the business."

"But what about bonuses, royalties, stock options, 401 (K) Plans?"

Lisa took my hand as we continued to watch from the doorway.

"Oh, I think you'll be quite pleased with our benefits. The retirement plan is really hot. And your new co-workers are a fun-loving, hell-raising bunch of guys...."

"Fine, fine," said George. "Of course, before we go any further, I'd like to have you sign a statement of intent. It's just the usual form; you can read it over if you like. That's it, right there beside the 'X'..." ❧

Witch Hunt
by Bobbi Miller

Like a shadow Isabeau moved.

The earth sloped, the trees thinned as she neared the woodsman's camp.

He sat alone in the dimming light, his eye narrowed to the squirrel searing on the campfire. Behind him, near the edge of firelight, two small figures lay with hands and feet trussed like game.

Hired by their father, it was for them she hunted. Her fingers flexed against her staff. A prescience, abrupt and strong, chilled her through.

But her staff was cool. The warning did not come from the witchwood. Still, with too many years as the hunter and the hunted, she didn't doubt the whispering.

Securing the staff against a tree, Isabeau reached up and over to free the crossbow strapped to her back. Her blue-green eyes glistened with the heat of the impending battle.

Low against the ground, she sighted the woodsman, then loosed her bolt.

But the woodsman had been expecting her. Snake-quick he swerved at the sounding from the twang of her bow string. So close the arrow singed his shoulder, but still the bolt missed its mark. His blade drawn, he seized the girl child, holding her up as a shield.

"Isabeau!" His bellow clapped the skies like thunder. "Your charge dies!"

The girl struggled against his grip as he brought the blade against her throat.

Isabeau drew in a breath, lowering her bow. Rage whipped through her as she realized the deception: the children were mere bait. The woodsman knew their father had been an old friend, knew it would be *she* engaged to search the children out. He'd known she'd follow.

She dropped the crossbow, reaching for her staff. Into the rim of firelight she stepped. Her face was wooden as she caught the man's gloat.

"Isabeau!" His voice was hard and low, his smile sly and confident.

She held his glare as another man stepped from behind the trees and into the clearing. Then another.

"A profitable day!" The woodsman relaxed his hold on the girl.

Isabeau braced herself. The trap had been set and sprung, the quarry caught. The woodsman by himself proved formidable, dangerous from sheer mass. Backed by two henchman, he might be invincible. Her day to die, perhaps; but she would not go alone.

She called upon the witchfire.

The woodsman peaked his brow, his stare slid to her staff. His smile quivered.

Isabeau twirled her staff through an arc, and swung it up so fast that the man to her right didn't see it coming. The rowan caught him high in the chest. Its flame seared him senseless.

The man to her left lunged forward, sword leveled.

Isabeau quickly pivoted out of the way.

"Isabeau!" The woodsman's blade danced across the little girl's shoulder. Her screech rent the air.

Isabeau's attention swerved, the barest moment. But it was enough. The henchman swung up with his blade, his full force behind his thrust.

She reeled, whirled her staff defensively over her head. As steel met wood the air exploded with witchfire.

Isabeau was pitched backwards from the force, the staff wrested from her grasp. A roar thrummed in her ears, the sharp smell of blood corrupted her nose. Her senses fled. Isabeau sprawled into unconsciousness.

"Lady?" a small voice whined, not too far from her ear.

For a long stiff moment Isabeau lay, fighting off the fog heavy in her mind.

"Are you awake?" The voice persisted, cutting through the mist.

She opened her eyes. Her head throbbed as if bells tolled between her ears.

"Lady?"

She turned her head slowly. The bells tolled louder. She looked to the boy who knelt a breath away.

He was a sprite, rail thin and white faced. Beneath a wisp of brown locks, blue eyes implored her.

"He took Emme."

So the girl lived. Isabeau managed to piece her thoughts together. Staggering to her feet, she realized the pain coursing through her was not all from her wounds.

She looked about for her staff. A violent chill swept through her as she realized the woodsman had taken it. Only one other would want—would need—that rowan. Only one would have the resources to plan such a ruse to get it. Only one other could control the witchflame.

The woodsman had taken it back to the witch who forged it.

More, the swordblow had splintered the rowan. The magic was dying.

His name was Pau.

"Be you a witch?" he asked.

Isabeau sat on her hams, considering the direction they must take.

"No," she said, without looking up from the hoof-mark imprinted on the earthen floor. The woodsman drove his horse into the heart of the forest. Tales of waylaid wanderers pricked her thoughts with a sense of dread. She knew this forest well. Too many times she had traversed the shadows of these ancient oaks.

No, her dread fell for the girl, for if she lived, she'd wish otherwise once the witch had her. And the boy, the whelp . .

She clenched her fist. The witch couldn't kill her as long as she had been protected by the rowan. Blinded -- blinded indeed, for in another life these might have been her issue. The witch missed nothing-- blinded by the task of rescuing the children, she hadn't seen the ruse to separate her from the rowan until too late.

Too late. The words reverberated through her thoughts with the finality of a death march.

"Lady, do we go after Emme?"

She stood, inhaling deep.

"We go after Emme."

Isabeau gathered the bolts from the quiver of the dead man, double-stuffing her own.

She didn't relish the thought of bringing the boy into the green land. But there was no choice. If she returned him

Witch Hunt

to his father, the witch might—would—use him again. For as long as Isabeau lived, the witch would shadow her. There was no place to hide him. She was his only hope.

"It'll be cold where we're going." Removing the dead man's tunic, she gestured for the boy to put it on. The boy complied, with a sour face. She roped it to a snug fit.

Turning back to the body, her fingers skimmed through pouches and pockets, palming anything of use and value. Finding a short knife, she proffered it to him. The boy secured the weapon in the rope belt.

Then Isabeau turned to the man whose sword blow had split the rowan. Unwittingly, the man had loosed the witchfire full upon himself. He lay contorted in everlasting agony, death's grimace frozen on scorched features no longer human.

She swallowed hard, her nap bristled. This was but a trickling of the power that awaited in the green land.

They delved into the forest's heart. Magic wrought the bent and hoary trunks. Gnarled roots heaved up and out of the forest mulch, reaching out to tear their feet from their torso. Blackened limbs twisted into a thick canopy, choking out the sunlight.

With rags and flint scoffed from the woodsman, Isabeau fashioned two torches. On they went, two small rings of light piercing the blacker-than-blackness, into the witch's den.

"Hold your flame high! It cannot bear the light!" Isabeau warned, her eyes drilling into the darkness surrounding them. Something skittered across the edge of her sight. She raised her torch, widening the field of light.

Like a shadow come alive, a black thing rose up from the earth. *Shadowling!* Slowly it spun, dead eyes wary of the torch, of Isabeau.

The hunter matched its movements, pivoting on the balls of her feet. Back to back Pau stood next to her, moving as she moved.

The shadowling hissed, its gnarled winged limbs clawing the air.

Abruptly, as if singed by the light, it howled with rage, scurrying into the darkness.

"It's gone!" Pau breathed.

Isabeau squared her shoulders, steeled herself for the attack she knew would come.

It happened with her next breath. The black thing careened against the rim of torch-light, then veered sharp.

"Flame high!" Isabeau shouted.

His knuckles white with his grasp, Pau thrust his torch out.

The thing rasped with fury. It hung near the edge of light, its courage visibly swelling. The witch demanded total obedience, total loyalty. Soon it'd ignore the torchlight and give its life to abide the witch.

"Another!" Isabeau shrilled, as a second black form oozed from the forest floor. "Torch high!"

The shadow creatures attacked.

Pau yelped as Isabeau pushed him aside. He struggled to keep his torch aflame.

She whirled hard and quick, thrust her torch up and out as the shadowlings bore down.

Her torchflame pierced through one dark shell, its tortured shrill riveting. Like blown leaves, the thing was gone.

That instant, the last shadow struck. Isabeau, shrieking, lurched forward and over the boy. Her torch was flung beyond her reach. The flame flickered, then died.

The creature latched to her back. Like a leech it sucked her spirit dry.

Pau scrambled, his fingers flexed against the torchwood. He swung hard, jamming the flame into the shadowling's heart.

Its death shrick cracked the air.

"We must move on!" Isabeau wheezed, struggling to her feet. Her quiver and crossbow had blocked the creature from a strong hold. But still its poison burned in her blood. Soon enough it'd burn through her spirit. She inhaled deep to steady herself. "More will come."

Pau gathered the lifeless torch, and used his own to rekindle the flame.

"Emme waits," he said, holding it up to her.

Isabeau took the lead, Pau not a step behind. The trees closed in like walls. Their roots, grown to disproportionate size, heaved up into a woven network of interconnecting strands, like stairs descending into the bowels of the earth.

The cold chewed through her heavy-hide jerkin. The air hung damp, stifling her breath. She was glad of it. The cold heightened the poison coursing through her, the pain wracked her muscles. The pain told her she yet lived to hate, to fight, to kill.

Pau rocked to a sudden halt, his eyes round in terror. Across their way lay the ravaged body of the woodsman.

"Keep your mind on Emme," Isabeau ushered him forward.

The boy stood steadfast, unable to look away. He swallowed hard.

"I was not what my father wanted or needed in an heir," he managed. "I am too small to fight, too dull to study. I cannot fail Emme, too."

"Then, Pau, we will not fail."

Down, down, down like a coiled snake the stairs wound, until at long last the stairs ended, flailing out into a hall. Their footfall, slight as it was, echoed into nothingness.

A scream rent through the chamber, one of tortured agony and fear.

"That's Emme!" Pau whispered.

The scream lingered into a thin wail. He stiffened. Isabeau grabbed his forearm.

"That's Emme!" he wrestled with her grip.

A muscle spasmed in her abdomen. It was too late for caution. She couldn't stop the poison eating through her, couldn't stop what fate held for this whelp.

"You're right," she loosed the boy's arm. "Call for her."

"Emme!" His cry bounced through the chamber.

"Pau ...?"

Torch high, the two followed the voice.

They found her, a tattered heap against a wall of tangled roots and black earth. Their torchlight enveloped her.

With a cry of pain, she raised her head, bloody hands covering her mouth.

"Emme!" Pau knelt beside her. His fingers brushed matted strands from her forehead. In the torchglow, she was as ephemeral as her brother, a wonder to look at with fawn hair and moony eyes.

"Isabeau!" The whisper rocked the hall, at once quiet and deafening. It scorched her skin with its familiarity, jarred her bones with its hatred.

It was the witch. She was not merely in the room; she encased it. She surrounded them.

The chamber was swathed in green light. Isabeau gasped to see just how vast the room really was. Her eyes swept across the greatness, across the many tables littered with dried leaves, twigs, oversized roots, dismembered creatures, clay jars...

Abruptly, their torches died. Emme shrieked and buried her face in her brother's shoulder.

"He told me he killed you," the voice laughed. "I knew he had not."

Isabeau pulled Pau to his feet.

"*Now* you go, boy," she urged him. She sweated from the poison's hold. She had to get them out before she succumbed to its heat.

"What of you?" he breathed.

"Don't you worry, boy, I'll be right

behind you," she lied.

Pau wrapped his arm about his sister's waist, then made a way toward the stairs.

Isabeau pivoted slowly about. There was something else...

Isa—beau...

Her head jerked around.

"Persippany?"

Pau turned at the sound of her voice.

Isabeau saw it then, across the room. Leaning against a cauldron, its wood splintered near the middle, was her rowan.

Isabeau bounded across the room. Her fingers tightened on the witchwood. She felt its cold. Like herself, the spirit in the wood was dying.

Just then, a black form lifted from the belly of the cauldron. Its shrill shook the walls. The shadow creature was massive, taloned, its facial features creviced and sharp. Its snout split into a wicked grin.

"Isabeau!" it hissed.

"You send your reflection to fight?" Isabeau crouched into a guard-stance, her staff raised. "Let it end here, between you and me!"

The hall filled with coarse, rolling laughter. "It has always been between you and me!"

The shadow creature lunged, claws extended. Isabeau dropped to roll. The thing swooped, missing its strike. Raging, it flew high to the ceiling.

Her muscles cried out as she called upon them for speed, for strength. She knew she couldn't kill it. Without witchflame or torchlight, she hoped only to hold it at bay until the children escaped.

"Isabeau!"

She swerved to see Pau standing with knife in hand.

"No!" she shouted.

Too late, her attention swayed. The shadow creature seized the advantage. The thing charged. Its hiss deepened with victorious satisfaction.

The poison lacerated her will as well as her muscles. Instinct prompted her now. Crossbow and quiver slipped from her shoulders.

She leapt sideways, staff arced as a shield against the extended talons. The force of the strike swept her off her feet. She fell with a heavy thud, the air forced out of her lungs.

Pau raced for the creature, arm up, knife ready.

The creature shrilled as the thin blade raked its backside. Undaunted, the boy drove it in again and again.

But the thing was wrought of darkness. Only light could penetrate its heart. It heaved its massive shoulders, removing the annoyance at its back.

The boy sprawled across the room.

Laughing, the creature turned on him.

Emme shrieked-- then, suddenly, she laughed, a cold penetrating laugh; and the green glow of the room coalesced about her. Instantly, the shadow creature dissipated into mist.

Isabeau half stumbled to her feet, turning to Emme. Emme had not survived, after all; it had not been his sister Pau had comforted. This, like the shadowlings, was but a reflection of the witch.

"Watch me, Isabeau!" the witch in Emme's form exulted. "Watch and remember!"

"Emme?" Pau couldn't move. His eyes implored the vision of his sister, whom he loved.

Isabeau couldn't move. Too weak, her will exhausted, she could only watch as the false Emme swirled her skirt. Her feet not touching the ground, the witch-girl closed in on the boy.

Isa-beau... A whispering, weak and desperate, waned at the back of Isabeau's thoughts. *We cannot ... die ... Sisters be ...*

Emme stooped to one knee, so close her skirts blanketed the boy's torso. Her taloned fingers stroked his cheek.

Memories ambushed Isabeau: of the night at the inn, of finding the mutilated bodies of the children... village children, royal children, children missing for months, found at last by her... of finding the rowan, aglow against the cold hearth; and, trapped with the witchwood, Persippany, as much an enigma as Isabeau's nameless, faceless nemesis...

Blamed for the kidnapping and murders, a bounty placed on her head, Isabeau had been running, hiding, ever since.

No more.

Her face savage with hate and pain, her grip tightened on her staff.

The boy held back for her sake. Pau must live! *This* child, the witch could not have!

Sisters be...

The rowan glowed, faint at first. From that spark, born of hate, came strength.

The witchfire burned through her, cleansing her blood, pumping life to her heart. It raged through her until, abruptly, a greater fire took hold, so bright it swallowed the embers of hate, so strong it pulsed with a life of its own.

"No more!" Isabeau straightened, her features blended with another's, her voice a chorus with two melodies.

'Emme' jolted upright, the boy forgotten.

"Persippany?" the witch smiled in recognition. "Your vassal hopes to kill me."

"We will," Isabeau countered.

"This one has been a challenge, and a nuisance." She walked slow, circling Isabeau. "She should have died long ago. Persippany, Persippany... you were my greatest..."

"No more the student!" Isabeau/Persippany cut in with a hiss. "Now be the time for the teacher to learn!"

'Emme' extended her hands. Green fire burst forth.

Isabeau danced from its path. The rowan flamed as she swung it up and out. The witchwood struck the witch across the chest.

'Emme' recoiled, the green illuminescence intensifying. Her lips curled back over her teeth, she skittered away unaffected, and flung another burst of demonflame.

Cat-quick, Isabeau wheeled and arced the staff up fast, hammering one end then the other into the witch, so fast the wood was a blur.

Again the false Emme staggered back, trailers of smoke curling from her tunic. Again, she recovered quickly.

"You cannot kill me!" the witch screeched, contorted with frenzied rage. "I created you!" Her crooked fingers clawed the air, flames darting out like knives.

The power of the witchflame stole through Isabeau as Persippany sang her vengeance.

Once more, Isabeau sliced the air with her staff. The witchwood burned bright, so bright ...

Abruptly the witchflame burst free of the rowan. Of its own, the flame filled the room, scoring vines and roots, walls and chairs and tables.

A heartbeat later, the flame smothered the demonfire, while the fire of Persippany bore into the possessed body of Emme.

A shriek, high and terrible, rose from her throat as she twisted to break free. The green glow vacated the waif. Again she shrilled in agony, but in a different voice, not the witch's.

The body exploded into ash.

"I cannot die--" A hiss trailed into silence.

The chamber went dark, save for the rowan's glow.

Emme was dead. The witch--maybe not. But he who might have been her son lived.

Pau coughed, struggling to his senses.

"I failed Emme. I failed my father."

"You did not fail. You live." Isabeau helped him to his feet.

"I love Emme," he cried, holding Isabeau.

He wouldn't understand now. But in the years to come, as he stood next to his father as the rightful heir, he'd realize his triumph.

She hoped she would be there to see him then ❧

What a Wizard Does
by Janet Kagan

Sable rose from the comfort of her goose-down pillow to stalk to the streaked window yet again. It had been raining steadily for a week now. She had spent some of that time profitably---rousting sniggets from the rugs or (her fur dry-spelled) catching such mice and moles as the wet brought to the surface. Of itself, rain did not bother her.

What did bother her---what set her tail twitching like a black and venomous snake---was the stench of misery that coiled from the village below to seep into every corner of the house she shared with Glory Two-Eyes. This morning it would have overpowered even the best of smells Glory could conjure.

It was the stench of children trapped---kept indoors for fear of colds. Base superstition, Glory called that. Likely, it had more to do with the desire to keep the children's clothing from being muddied. In which case, Sable thought, it would be sensible to send them out without the clothing. It was certainly warm enough for most creatures (even those lacking her superb coat and her dry-spells) to go 'unprotected.'

The atmosphere had begun to affect

the adults as well, which only added to the misery of the children.

Sable paced once more and, for something to do, made herself a moth-spell and chased it up the drapes. She was midway to the ceiling before she realized she had miscalculated the weight the drapes would hold. The drapes gave a lurch.

So disgusted was she---with the way the world smelled and with herself---that she made no magic to counter the impending disaster. Wood splintered above her, and down she and the drapes went, a tangle of black cat and blue linen.

Still too irritable to extricate herself with the ease of a spell, she clawed her way out. Ripping brought her a certain sense of satisfaction... until she emerged and looked up.

Glory loomed over her, hands on hips. "Well?" There was an edge to Glory's voice.

"Don't help," Sable said. "You wouldn't want me to get fat and lazy like some familiars I could name." She twitched her tail free and sniffed dramatically. There was an edge to Glory's scent as well. "The weather's not doing your personality any good either, I see. I try to get a little exercise and a little entertainment and what do I get?" Sable yawned, flashing sharp white teeth. "I get, *'Well?'*" she mimicked. "Well, what good is having a wizard around the house if she won't provide a little sunshine, O great and awesome Glory Two-Eyes?"

Glory had not changed her stance. If anything, she loomed more ominously. "Meddling in the weather---"

The looming didn't impress Sable; she knew how the trick was done. "Requires enormous energy and results in terrible backlash if you're not careful," she finished for Glory. "Think of something else, then. The whole village reeks of depression and impatience and only World Entire knows what else. A few more days of this and there'll be murder done."

Glory jerked back her head, dark hair flying. "You think so?"

Irritation ran the length of Sable's spine and set her tail twitching again. "You curl up with your books and scrolls and your toms and you don't pay attention. Yes, I think so---if something or *somebody* doesn't crack the pattern."

"All right," said Glory. "Let's see what we can do."

"It's about time."

Stepping over the shredded draperies, Glory threw open the window and crooked an arm in Sable's direction. Sable preened her shoulder and said, "If you need my help to read that pattern, you're of no use to any of us." Glory sighed and set to work.

Sable knew just what she would see. The shifting currents that flowed to and from the village today eddied dark and muddy. That would have been bad enough, but there was worse. Over the village itself, the thick, dark currents slowed, then halted altogether. It was as if the village drowned in stagnant water.

Glory turned back. "You're right, Sable," she said.

Of course she was right. Offended by the implication that she might possibly have been wrong, Sable glared.

"I'd risk interfering in that to prevent a famine," Glory said, misreading Sable's glare, "but not to lift a depression." Forestalling any comment on Sable's part, Glory raised her hands and added, "I'll think of something."

"You'd better. Let something like that go on and you don't know what the populace will nightmare up. Next month they may decide that black cats are bad luck."

"What?" Glory's dark brows knitted. Sable thrust her hind leg forward and licked her heel in contempt. "You were the one who told me this business about children catching colds from playing in the rain was pure superstition."

Glory's scent changed abruptly. Sable put her heel down and looked up in time to see a smile spread slowly across Glory's face. That was what Sable had been waiting for: Glory had thought of a counter-spell for the rain-soaked village.

Sable stretched her pleasure. "What would we do without magic," she said.

The smile turned to a grin. "Come with me and I'll show you."

"You can't shift those patterns without sorcery." Sable eyed her scornfully---then thought better of it and amended the statement: *"Even* you can't."

Glory took no offense. "What a wizard does is magic," she said. "I mean to use a little neverburn, unless you have some objection." The grin was, if anything, broader.

Neverburn scarcely counted as sorcery. It was as rudimentary a spell as the *up* Sable had neglected to use when she climbed the drapes. Sable waited for a further explanation.

She received none. So Glory had taken offense after all. Glory had as fine a sense of retribution as any cat. Well, if Glory was not about to tell Sable what she had planned, Sable was not about to give her the satisfaction of asking. There was nothing for it but to follow along and see what Glory had in mind.

"Use all the neverburn you want," Sable said. "You'd overrule my objections if I had them, so I seldom do."

Glory chuckled. Sparkles of neverburn appeared between her fingertips and she set them in her hair like tiny stars. Then she stripped out of her clothes, heaping them up on the table. From the hook near the door, she took up her hooded drycloak and threw it around her.

"Are you ready?" Glory crooked an elbow.

By this time, Sable was sure her eyes were enormous, but she feigned nonchalance. She was cursed if she'd ask. "Of course," she said.

With an *up*, she sprang for Glory's elbow, then for her shoulder, and on into the voluminous hood. She *upped* a second time---the fabric of the drycloak was thin and Glory had no protection beneath it. Irritable she might be, but she had no desire to sink her claws into Glory's shoulder for purchase---that would have been admitting that Glory was getting to her.

Glory padded softly down the path that led through Silverfir Forest and into the village. The shoes she'd left behind looked so forlorn that Sable considered conjuring a family of field mice to keep them company. And fleas for Glory's abandoned gown. *Cursed* if she'd ask!

At each house along the way, Glory paused to knock. When they had been welcomed and Glory had declined offers of food and tea, Glory told each householder, "I need the children."

When asked for what purpose, she said only, "Can't you feel the oppressiveness?" The villagers could, of course, and they agreed to send the children to Glory at council hall.

Glory stopped at the post as well. Jennet Fast-Foot went for the children at the other end of town and Tomas and Cecilany rode to fetch those from the outlying farms. Glory was determined not to miss a one.

Then there was nothing to do but

make for the shelter of the council hall and wait. Glory was still being stubborn, so they waited in silence. Doing her best to ignore both the stench and Glory's stubbornness, Sable dozed.

Clatter and chatter woke her. The children had begun to arrive, bringing with them a brightening of the atmosphere that Sable had not expected. Glory hadn't, after all, done anything yet.

Glory only nodded solemnly at each arrival. Awed by her manner, they tried to match her solemnity. In the end, of course, they couldn't. Little Bit and Wozzle hushed their younger sisters---toddlers both---and got giggles. Tall Rob joked, his bravado silenced by a dark frown from the much smaller Ray Golden---who then dissolved into giggles herself.

A heady scent of anticipation cleared much of the smell of misery from the council hall. *Maybe Glory has done something already*, Sable thought, surprised that she could have slept through any of Glory's magic.

Sable made a quick check of her own. No, Glory'd done no magic. Yet the atmosphere had changed. She turned her attention to the children.

They were, as Sable had expected, bundled in drycloaks (or cloaks of a simpler sort);their heads were covered with scarves and hats. They should have smelled stifled but didn't.

Their necks were festooned with talismans---Sable couldn't remember the last time she'd seen so many in one place---and their pockets filled with charms and cookies. If they were to be involved in magic, their parents reasoned, they would need all the help they could get---and all the energy the cookies would provide.

Glory still said nothing. She sat on the council table, clasping her drawn-up knees in her bare arms, her mud-spattered toes peeking from beneath her drycloak. Sable remained hidden in the depths of the cowl, seeing but not seen.

The mayor and her council made a sudden appearance in full regalia. They bowed as one. "Glory Two-Eyes," said the mayor, "we are honored by your presence."

"Thank you, Helen of Wye, but I must ask you to leave us now. We have a great deal of work to do."

Helen of Wye glaced at the children. Annie-Tiptoe, who was the youngest, waved. Helen of Wye, somewhat embarrassed, waved back. "I must ask if what you intend bodes any danger to the children."

"There is greater danger to them if I fail to accomplish my ends."

Sable stirred within the hood and said, "Now you've worried them." Glory answered silently, *Only the adults. The children are more excited.* A sniff of the air told Sable this was true.

"If you wish, you may send Granny Sassy, Eloise-That-Liar, and Ringgold to assist us," Glory said aloud. "In fact, I would prefer it."

Skinny Lem, at a look from Helen, dashed off into the rain to round up the three she had named. "Granny Sassy should be enough chaperone for anybody," Sable said. "Why go to the trouble to add Eloise-That-Liar and Ringgold?"

"Because what I plan will give Eloise-That-Liar a week's worth of new tales to tell," Glory said.

That made sense, until Sable realized that Glory meant to leave Ringgold unexplained. Well, Sable didn't mind Glory's quirk. Ringgold was the town's herbalist, and Sable enjoyed smelling him.

Helen of Wye did not move until the three adults named had arrived; then, with a last embarrassed wave at Annie-Tiptoe, she hurried her council away.

Granny Sassy pushed the door shut, slamming it for attention, and said, "I hope you're not messing with the weather, child. I won't have it, you know."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Glory said with a smile. Then, more solemnly, she added, "But this gloom isn't natural and must be lifted."

Granny Sassy snorted. "I'd have called it perfectly natural after a week of rain. Still...if you're proposing to do something about it, let's get on with it."

Glory nodded and stood. She threw back the hood of her drycloak, revealing Sable and the neverburn sparkles in her hair. There was a murmur of delight from the children. More neverburn sparkles began to appear between her fingers.

"My friends," Glory said, "you have all felt the terrible gloom in this village. With Sable's help, I've learned the cause of it."

"Oh!" said Little Bit. Her eyes were wide but Sable couldn't tell if that was in reaction to what she'd heard or what she saw. "Who's doing it to us?"

"Not who," said Glory. "*What.* Sniggets---an invasion of sniggets."

"Sniggets!" said a surprised voice from the crowd.

Little Bit turned. "Sniggets are those pesty things that cats pounce on all the time, only we can't see them," she said helpfully.

"I know what sniggets are," said the same voice, scornfully this time. "They don't bother *people.*"

"This many sniggets can and do bother people," Glory said. "I admit it doesn't happen often, but it has happened and you can feel the result."

Sable said privately, "You're almost as good as Eloise-That-Liar. Sniggets, indeed."

Glory ignored her, finishing aloud, "To put an end to this problem, I'll need your help. Will you give it?"

"Oh, yes!" said Little Bit, glancing at Wozzle, her best friend. Wozzle nodded enthusiastically, first at Little Bit, then at Glory. A chorus of assent followed.

"You must do exactly as I say," Glory cautioned them, but again she received their consent.

"Good," she said. "Then let's get to it." She moved around the room and fixed a handful of neverburn sparkles in the hair of each, kneeling to reach the little ones, standing on tiptoe to adorn Ringgold. Sable caught a distinct whiff of attraction between the two and commented, "Ah, so that's why you included Ringgold. You and your damn toms." But she breathed in the herbs and their mutual attraction with content.

"Oh, Little Bit, you look so pretty!" Wozzle said, clasping her hands together in inimtation of her mother's manner.

"You look so pretty, too!" Little Bit told her, loyally. The two were constant companions and not to be outdone in their admiration for one another.

Eloise-That-Liar produced her pocket mirror. By far the prettiest young woman in the village, Eloise-That-Liar used it only to practice comic faces for her tales. Today it was passed from hand to hand, so each child could see her own spangles. Sable followed the mirror's progress through the crowd by ear, listening for the oooohs and aaaaahs.

It was Granny Sassy that Glory adorned last, and even she could not

resist a peek in Eloise-That-Liar's mirror. "A good start," she told Glory in a somewhat grudging tone. "Let's see what comes next."

Glory strode to the council table. *Off, Sable,* she said, voicelessly, and Sable walked down her arm to pose where she could see and be seen best.

Glory raised her arms, and there was, after some minor shushing, a silence. "Next," she said, "take off your boots and stockings."

This took a considerable length of time, with the older ones helping the younger ones--many of whom would have done much better without the help.

When they had finished the task, Glory raised her hands again. "And now, take off all the clothes that remain. You may wear your talismans and carry your charms but---this is the important part---all of your skin must be exposed to the rain."

There was a squeak of protest from one of the adolescents. Glory fixed him with a stare. "Do you wish to help the village?"

Tall Rob nodded reluctantly. His face was scarlet.

"Tall Rob," she added gently, "I would not ask anything of you I would not do myself." Without fanfare, she unbound her drycloak and doffed it, laying it beside Sable on the council table. Sable could smell Tall Rob's relief---and Ringgold's desire.

There was another scent as well, sharp and strong and as pleasing as any Sable had smelled. She could not locate the source---until Granny Sassy did an unheard-of thing: she laughed aloud.

Granny Sassy began to take off her clothes, and Sable knew the scent was her pure delight.

With much giggling and laughter, all the children peeled off their heavy, bundled clothing---cloaks, blouses, linens, trousers---everything went jumbling to the floor. The talismans went back around their necks, though several of the smallest children squealed at the coldness of some of those spells. Glory made a circuit of the room to bind charms to bare chests so they need not be carried.

Granny Sassy said, "You're a wicked wizard, Glory."

"And you're a naughty old lady, Granny---everybody knows it."

Granny Sassy laughed again. "If they didn't this morning, they will this afternoon, child."

Glory clapped her hands above her head. A shower of neverburn fountained between them, curved and cascaded to the floor around her, like the Queen's Own Fireworks.

She had the attention of all. "Our work begins," she said. "The sniggets lurk in puddles on every street corner on every street in town. We are going to drive them out!"

Eloise-That-Liar cheered and was promptly joined by a dozen or more voices and a chorus of giggles.

"Here's how we do it," Glory went on. "We make loud joyful noises---sing, shout, laugh!---and jump into their puddles. It doesn't matter if five of us jump into the same one, as long as we don't miss a single puddle within the circuit of the city. Splash the sniggets out!"

She took Little Bit's hand and Little Bit took Wozzle's and Wozzle reached to her young sister's. As they all linked hands, Glory opened the door into the rain. "Sing, Ringgold!" she shouted. Ringgold started the children's chant that called the stars back from the rain, and it was immediately taken up by the children.

Over the din, Glory shouted again, "We dance to the square and part from there!"

She led them dancing, singing, shouting and giggling into the warm summer rain.

As Granny Sassy took up the rear of the line, Sable trotted to the door to watch. Through the shielding rain, she could just barely see that the head of the line had reached the square. Glory jumped into the largest puddle with a shout of laughter and an "Out, sniggets, out!" and stood to point the children in various directions.

Two adults in cloaks froze to watch, then abruptly ran for cover. Little Bit and Wozzle were showing their younger sisters the *right* way to jump

into puddles, while Eloise-That-Liar turned a cartwheel in the rain.

"You're a snob, Sable."

Sable looked up just in time to see Granny Sassy dance through the door with the end of the line.

"You can't give me fleas," Granny Sassy called, breathless but taunting. "I'd just brush 'em off. They only work on people in clothes! Snob!" she called again.

It was too much for Sable---and it was apparent that they were all going to have a great deal of fun. She darted out into the rain after them.

The next few hours were the liveliest she had ever spent, and she recalled only confused images of them. Shocked and delighted expressions on the faces of the adult villagers (sometimes both at once!), the yelps and squeals of children as they splatted into puddles over and over again, splashing each other with warm, muddy water. Eloise-That-Liar, who stood on her hands and pitched full-length and spread-eagled into the largest standing pool she could find... Glory dancing a circle-dance with a dozen youngsters as they kicked through puddled water, neverburn still sparkling through the muddy water that dripped from her long locks of hair....

And above it all, the scent of joy and the bright rupture of the lines of disturbance that had entwined the village.

Sable heard the glass-like tinkle of a sequence of spells and looked up from the puddle to find herself seeing a rainbow. And it was no ordinary rainbow, it was her own private vision. Nor was it an arc---it was a complete circle and she knew she was the very center of it.

In the back of her mind, she knew very well that each child saw the same thing: each child was the beginning and end of his or her own rainbow... She could not take her eyes off it until it faded gently into the mist and was gone.

When she looked around, she saw Eloise-That-Liar stretch out her hand as if to call it back. Granny Sassy shook herself as if from a dream; the two children beside her were open-mouthed in wonder.

"We've done it," said Glory, with satisfaction, and the children, as if compelled, drew toward her. "Yes," she told them, "you saw. We drove all the sniggets out. You did a good job of it, too. Now you deserve a rest---go home, bathe away the mud, and tell your parents I prescribed a restorative of hot honey-lemonade and candies."

Still awed, the children quietly nodded and began to disperse. As they passed through the rain-soaked streets, they at last regained their tongues---and Sable could hear that the topic of conversation was hot honey-lemonade.

Granny Sassy looked at the handful remaining, who had been brought by rider, and said, "I'll see to hot honey-lemonade for these --I could use some myself. I'm a little hoarse from all that shouting." Very softly, she added, "Thank you, Glory. I've never seen the like." She bustled the children away. Then, to restore her sharp-tongued image, she shot back over her shoulder, "Clean up, child. You look a perfect mess."

Sable considered Glory: she was streaked with mud. Her hair was matted and dripping, but the neverburn still twinkled. "She's right, you know," Sable said critically.

Glory spread her hands and looked down at herself and began to laugh. "You should talk, you didn't even dryspell yourself."

Sable twisted to wash her shoulder and got a tongue-full of mud. Disgusted, she shook violently, spattering Glory further.

"If you please, Glory Two-Eyes," Ringgold ducked his head defentially, "you would be welcome to bathe at my house. Sable too, of course," he added hastily, as Sable glared at him.

Aha! thought Sable at Glory, *Now it comes out...*

"Don't be such a grouch," Glory replied.

I'm wet! She shook again. This time she spelled the flying drops for emphasis: each and every one got Glory.

I'll see you dry first, Glory assured her, chuckling. Aloud, to Ringgold, she said, "We'd be delighted to accept your offer."

"And you can bet she doesn't mean just the bath," Sable commented, but Ringgold was deaf to all but Glory's magic. Glory was right, Sable reflected. Spells or no spells, what a wizard does is magic. ❧

Janet Kagan,

My current credits include HELLSPARK (an sf novel from Tor; a main selection of the SFBC for "Fall" of '89), UHURA'S SONG (a Star Trek novel), "The Loch Moose Monster" (Asimov's, March '89), "Naked Wish-Fulfillment" (Pulphouse, Spring '89), "The Return of the Kangaroo Rex" (Asimov's, October '89), and "The Flowering Inferno" (Asimov's, March '90). Forthcoming in Asimov's will be "Getting the Bugs Out".

I am extremely pleased to announce that "The Loch Moose Monster" is the recipient of the 1989 ASIMOV's Readers' Award for Best Novelette. And I'm just as pleased to announce that "The Return of the Kangaroo Rex" cane in second in the same category.

Personally, I'm an old married lady --- coming up on 20 years now! My husband Ricky is a programmer and the best first reader I know. Six cats graciously share their house with us. My grandfather claimed to have been the first person to arrive in North American waters upside-down, thus establishing a family tradition (of what, I couldn't begin to describe in this short a space).

This particular story comes form fond memories of my own childhood play in the rain...and form a smart-mouth cat known in our household as "The Demon".

POTION

by Joseph M. Kurtenbach

I never would have believed it was possible. I dabble in magic; I've memorized some intricate spells, and can cast many simpler ones with a thought. I've seen so-called potions and magic elixirs come and go, but never anything like this.

The creator, an aging old alchemist friend of mine, claims it isn't even magic. "Not a lick of sorcery in it! Not a drop of snake spittle, not a granule of ground-up bone, not a flake of dried blood. No incantations or demon beseechings. Just the perfect blend of my secret ingredients!"

I believed this much of what he said, but still couldn't take his claim seriously. I didn't want to berate his efforts, though. He was my friend, and I respected him.

"So why are you telling me all this, Lethyes?" I queried, hands on hips, eyes narrowed with suspicion. "Why did you send your page all the way across town in a snowstorm to fetch me here to tell me this? You know I hate snow."

Lethyes began tapping the tabletop with his fingers, anxiously averting his eyes. "Oh, well, I just got excited is all, Sirel." His brow wrinkled in dismay, and I couldn't keep from smiling. He babbled, "I do apologize, I'm such an old fool. You can stay in the spare room until the storm is over. I have plenty of food and I can always send Dalkon to the market. He loves the snow." His finger-tapping became more pronounced, and a glass beaker full of some opaque, unwholesome-looking fluid on the table began to rattle against other assorted glassware. His eyes began to search titles stacked on bookshelves nearby.

I walked over to the old man and put my hand on his shoulder. "It's all right, Lethyes. I can make it home okay." Besides, the musty old room he spoke of had no windows and smelled about as pleasant as a tomb. I pointed at the brown gloop in the beaker on the table. "I hope that's not it."

Lethyes followed my gesture, and started. "Oh, no, no, no." He chuckled, becoming his old self once again. "That's liniment for my aching joints. Works wonders. Not kind on the nose, however."

Then he looked back to me, pious once again, almost fatherlike -- or grandfatherlike. "Look at you!" He waved his hand in my face. "Such a beautiful young woman." I'd heard this coming as soon as he'd started describing the potion to me. He continued to preach and gesticulate at me. "Daughter of the finest artisan in town. Granddaughter of Egan the wizard. Skilled craftswoman and magician in your own right. You should have a husband." He emphasized the last by pounding his fist on the table. A piece of glass tubing fell and stuck upright in the jar of liniment.

He finished more quietly, "I made it for you."

I rolled my eyes and turned away from him. "Don't you think I'm old enough to decide when I need-- when I *want* a husband? I don't need a potion, it won't do any good on someone I haven't met yet. But when I do meet him, I don't want to intoxicate him with some potion to make him love me." And if this were like every other love potion I'd heard of, the effects would either wear off rapidly, or backfire somehow on the instigator.

"No, no, no!" Lethyes insisted. "It's not to intoxicate the man. You drink it yourself, anytime you please. Then you use the power whenever you want. That's the beauty of it, you see? Use it anytime, for any man you choose. Years from now, even." Then his voice lowered to a serious whisper. "But it only works once."

Something inside me, eager, almost frightening, pulsed with anticipation. But no, it couldn't work. This had to be the most absurd tonic Lethyes had come up with yet.

I swallowed hard. "How do you know it works?" I was curious.

The old alchemist puffed himself up, as if beyond repudiation. "I know, girl."

So he hadn't tested it. But somehow, suddenly, I believed him. Something about his demeanor made me regret my doubt. Lethyes always denied having any kind of magical skill. Yet my late grandfather, Egan the wizard, had respected the old man-- they'd been the best of friends. And more than once, after visiting Lethyes together when I was younger, I recall my grandfather turning to me, frowning deeply. He'd clear his throat and not to himself, as he always did before speaking, and grumble softly to me, "I feel strange things when I'm around that man, child. Strange things."

Lethyes seemed more confident to

POTION

me now than with anything else he'd ever created. I think he usually knew when something he did wouldn't work, though he wouldn't admit it. He simply wouldn't let anyone try it.

"It has no real purpose in all practicality," he'd say, or some similar excuse, and quickly change the subject.

But about this potion he felt sure.

I, on the other hand, felt terribly uneasy.

"Where is it?" I said, feeling my resistance crumble.

Lethyes smiled broadly, exposing yellowed teeth and two dark gaps where teeth were missing. He turned around and began to undo the intricate clasping mechanism on the door of a wooden hold built into his bookshelves. He'd tried to teach me the trick of opening the box once, but I no longer remembered.

"Heh, heh," he chuckled to himself, his back to me, as the door to the box swung open. He reached in and drew something out. Holding it cradled in his hands, he turned to me. In a crystal flask, a pinkish, clear fluid swirled gently. It looked like colored water. "Tastes fruity, too," the alchemist said.

He carefully proffered it to me.

As I walked home through the cold and snow, the once dreary stone and brick of the shops, apartments, and paved streets seemed suddenly stripped of their winter bleakness. I carried the potion within my coat, holding it close to me as if it were a source of warmth.

I wondered for a short time what I had done, in accepting Lethyes's gift. To what kind of act had I committed myself?

But my insinctive wariness waned, giving way to growing excitement, a pleasant stirring within me that I hadn't felt in a long time. Emotions had not been kind to me in the past, but what I carried with me now gave me a joyous sense of control. I had sworn my heart would never break again.

I was to find I still had many things to learn.

When I reached my small apartment, cluttered with books of spells from my grandfather, and tapestries I'd woven just for the sake of creating them, I set the flask carefully down on a spot of bare tabletop, and stepped back to stare at it.

I could drink it now and get it over with.

Or I could wait, think about it, let my emotions calm before dedicating myself to this questionable venture.

I decided to wait.

Why, I don't know. But the decision may have saved me from the biggest mistake of my life.

I'd brought some of my work -- wall hangings, rugs and table-mats -- to the harvest market to sell. It wasn't actually harvest time, mind you; winter had barely drawn to a close, opening the way for spring. But this market had acquired the name *harvest market*, no matter the time of year. The title had more to do with location. The market tents and booths were set up, some permanently, at the crossroads between several villages, in the midst of fields of fertile farmland. It was the largest market I knew, and gave me a chance to get out into the open countryside and admire that which I tried to convey in my work, and to see new faces.

The one person I may have chosen not to see, however, was there.

I stood, huddled in my coat against the chill air, in a small booth, my work displayed around me, hanging behind me. I saw him at the edge of the market, examining some kettles at a metalwright's booth. An old scar tore open within me, and the outside cold rushed to my bones. I had loved him once, and suddenly realized I still did. I bent my head and watched him; yes, it was he. So many times after he'd left I'd thought I'd seen him-- the hair, the stature, the curve of the face-- only to realize it was a stranger. My mind had finally gotten over that, I'd thought. *But it was he.*

I didn't want him to see me, I realized in panic. I couldn't bear the thought of him turning away if he saw me, couldn't imagine myself being able to talk to him like an old friend if he approached.

I cursed myself. Tears rolled down my cheeks like droplets of resolve. I thanked the powers no one shopped nearby, as I turned and stepped around behind my booth, weeping. Chests and crates were stacked here, behind the market line. Several wagons also stood empty, their horses stabled for the day in the livery tent.

I thought for a moment, cleared my mind of roiling emotions, and organized the words. Yes, I still remembered the spell, though it was newly committed to memory. I felt a brief moment of pride at that, and brushed the tears from my icy cheeks. I hadn't mastered the spell yet, couldn't cast it with a thought. But that also would come in time, I knew.

I bowed my head, and emptied my mind with practiced ease, despite the exploding convolutions of my heart and the cold bumps rising like waves over my skin. I silently uttered the words, each one passing my moving lips and filling my mind in turn, until the spell was complete.

The spell was powerful. A true wizard would have seen through it, and someone my equal might have been able to penetrate it, with difficulty; but everyone here seemed oblivious to it, and to me.

The actual spell was one of illusion; I did not truly become invisible. But the protective shielding effect of the incantation caused the minds of others not to comprehend nor to register what they saw when they looked at me. They could not see through me-- they still had to look around me to see things behind me- but it never really dawned on them that they were doing so.

I stood at the entrance to my booth, and watched him. He moved from one marketer to another, as in my mind he moved from one painful dream of longing to another, pausing to look for something he might desire, finding nothing. He had rejected me. I could not stop the flow of my tears; I tried to swallow my sobs, that they would not be heard.

I thought of the potion then. I would have used it. I know that I would have.

And at that realization, I felt so deeply ashamed that my weeping stopped. He had not loved me of his own free will, though I loved him-- and now I was ready to steal that love from him. I had never before seen the depths of my selfishness. I wished I were truly invisible then-- to the numbing cold, to the wind that blew me into small, hopeless fragments. More than invisible, I wished I did not exist.

I stopped watching him; I couldn't stand it any longer. I spent the rest of the icy afternoon huddled in the back of a wagon, within my spell. The business I lost mattered nothing to me. My art pieces sat the afternoon alone, as if only to be admired, not purchased.

As the sun fell low, late in the after-

noon, I muttered the words that undid my spell; then went and helped the trader I'd come with pack his wagon with our belongings. He was a friendly old gentleman, but very quiet; we exchanged few words, until we'd almost reached our town. His curiosity and empathy must finally have overwhelmed his shyness, and he spoke.

"Doesn't appear you did much business today," he stated, roundaboutly. I knew it was his way of asking if I was all right.

"No, I'm afraid I didn't. I didn't feel well this afternoon, and spent most of the time lying in a wagon, like a body in a tomb." It was the truth, though not the total truth.

"Sorry to hear," he said, in his slow way, with honest feeling. "Might have been more comfortable in a tent."

"I prefered the quiet," I admitted.

"Feeling better now, I hope?" He glanced at me quickly, then fixed his eyes back on his horses and the road ahead.

I managed a smile for him. "Yes. Thank you."

I knew after that day that I couldn't use the potion. Perhaps if I'd never been in love before, if I didn't have memories that haunted me, if I were more naive and less virtuous, I might have. I'd felt as if I were on a pinnacle after accepting Lethyes's gift. I knew now that I'd had my deserved fall, and chided myself for my weakness. How I'd let myself be drawn in by the artifice of it, I didn't know. I'd reached beyond hope, and reached too far; tried to grasp at love, teetering on the edge, still ignorant that love cannot be grasped. And so I fell anew into my self-made abyss of despair.

I moiled over what I would tell Lethyes. Another peg in the crucifix of my depression was the hurt I would cause the old alchemist if I returned the potion to him. I knew I could pour away the liquid, and simply tell him I waited for the right person. But I could no more lie to the old man than I could drink the elixir he'd given me.

Several days trudged by, as if bogged down by my mood. I worked and taught in the artisan section of town, while trying to erase an old pain and come to terms with my own emotional crisis. I didn't feel like talking to anyone-- certainly not to Lethyes, and for some reason not to my father, the two wisest people I knew. And my friends would be of no help. *Forget about him,* they'd say, as if that were some secret remedy for grief; or else, *Don't be a fool, drink it!*

I wished my mother were still alive. I could have talked to her.

I thought about her more and more as the days went by, about her sudden illness, and I wept in loneliness for her. But another thing I remembered, as I thought of her: I didn't need her here with me to know what she would say to console me. I thought of her personal strength, her brimming love. I heard the words she had spoken to me time and again, always in a different way, but always in a way I understood. And the way she lived her own advice.

The hour finally came when I knew what I had to do.

I drank the potion.

Though the liquid was cool, I felt a warmth spread through me as I swallowed it, like an embrace. And I remembered my mother's words: *Forgive yourself, believe in yourself, love yourself, and you invite others to do the same.*

I concentrated for several moments, as Lethyes had told me. And the potion worked.

I felt it, like a release, like a dam burst within me, and I wept again, but this time for joy. For I used the potion in a way that, perhaps, was not intended, but still miraculously, beautifully, worked.

I used it on no one else but myself.

And in the aftermath, the thing that struck me most was the knowledge that I never would have needed the potion. The real ingredients had been within me all along. I had only to realize they were there, and drink them in. I hadn't realized how thirsty I was for my own forgiveness and love.

Yes, Mother. Thank you.

When I told Lethyes what I had done, glowing in my inner transformation, he thought about it, nodding slowly (reminding me of my grandfather), then smiled at me, toothless gaps in prominence. "I knew you'd make the right decision, Sirel, my beautiful young lady." He came forward and put his hands on my shoulders-- a warm embrace, for him. He acted as if he'd known the final outcome all along, since the very day he'd made the potion. Which, in turn, made me smile.

He nodded again, wise and knowing. "I felt sure you'd make the right decision."

I crushed him in a warm embrace of my own. ❧

BACK ISSUES !!!

Issue #1 (Summer 1988) includes:
Imagination and Reason– Poul Anderson
The Skycastle– Bruce D. Arthurs
The Final Bet - MZB
Final Exam– Jennifer Roberson
Cover art : George Barr

Issue #2 (Fall 1988) includes:
The Hitchhiker– Jayge Carr
Was Startling Stories the First Interactive Magazine?– Richard A. Lupoff
Bone Serai– Susan Schwartz
Cover art : George Barr

Issue #3 (Winter 1989) – SOLD OUT

Issue #4 (Spring 1989) includes:
Talishada's Familiar– George Barr, artist and author
House of Wizards– Laurell K. Hamilton

Issue #5 (Summer 1989) includes:
The Dragon, the Unicorn and ... Phyllis Ann Karr
Do Virgins Taste Better?– Deborah Millitello
Dragon Three Two Niner-Peter L. Manly
Cover art: George Barr

Issue #6 (Fall 1989) includes:
Nightside– Mercedes Lackey
Aventura– Jacqueline Lichtenberg
The Palace of Al-Tir
Al-Abtan– Lawrence Watt-Evans
Cover art: Laura and Frank Kelly Freas

Issue #7 (Winter 1990) includes:
Daughter of the Oak-David Shea
Kill Dance--Mary Turzillo
Night-Bound - Cynthia Drolet
Cover Art: George Barr

Issue #8 (Spring 1990) includes:
Change- –Jo Clayton
Son of the Sun – Patricia Shaw Mathews
No Nice Way to Put It–Parke Godwin
Cover Art: James Balkovek

Issue #9 (Spring 1990) – Special Short-Short Issue (40 Stories - plus articles!)

Please send me ASAP the following back issues of MZB's ***Fantasy Magazine*** at $4.95 each, plus a flat $1.50 for postage and handling on each order:

❑ #1 Summer '88 ❑ #6 Fall '89
❑ #2 Fall '88 ❑ #7 Winter '90
❑ #4 Spring '89 ❑ #8 Spring '90
❑ #5 Summer '89 ❑ #9 Summer '90

Please enclose check or money order in U.S. funds. Thank you for your order.

Name _____

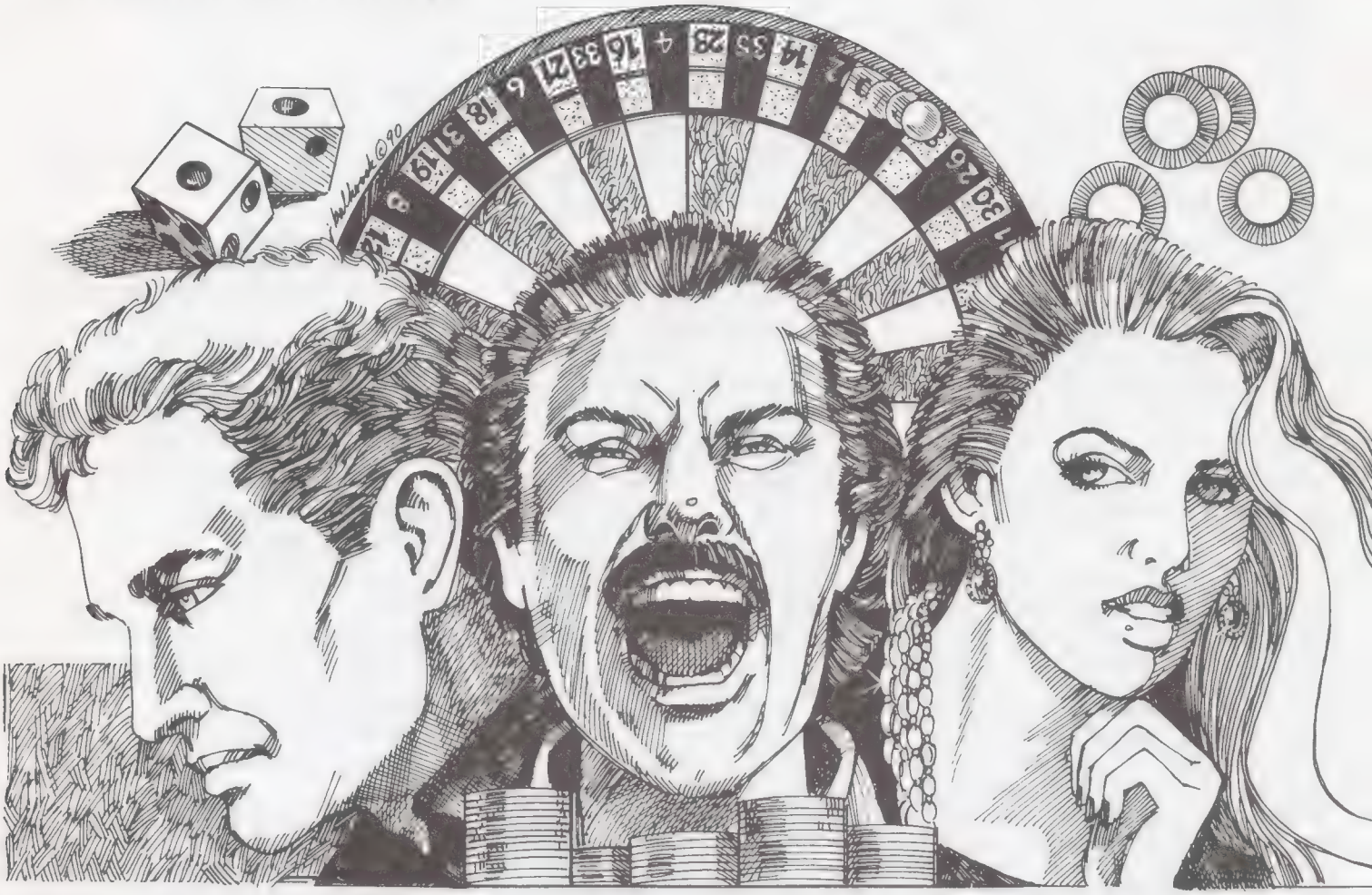
Address _____

City _____ St ___ Zip _____

MZB Ltd, P.O. Box 11095, Oakland, CA 94611-9991

The Loser

by John Downing



Bunker T. Holland was a loser. He was a loser at life and at love and, especially, at games of chance. He couldn't remember a single time in all the years of his life when anything had gone right for him.

Christened Bunker after a second cousin of his mother (in his grimmer moments he wondered if his bad luck hadn't begun right there), he was called Bunky by his friends and, with a different intonation, also by his enemies. He had often toyed with the idea of changing his name, to something plain like Joe or Bob, but he had never followed through. He couldn't see that it would make any difference. A rose by any other name...

Instead, he adjusted: to his name, by never letting on that it bothered him; to his loser-hood, by mapping out a strategy that, he hoped, would see him safely through the minefield that was life. Mostly the strategy called for evasive action, and lots of it.

Toward life in general he assumed a defensive posture. Like a man passing through a tough neighborhood who walks quickly with his head down to avoid making eye contact with anyone, so Holland passed through life, satisfied if he reached the end of each day no worse off than he had started it.

As for love, bitter experience had taught him that, contrary to what the song says, it was better not to love at all than to love and lose. And since sex without love could lead to just as much grief as sex with love, he had resigned himself to living the life of a monk. At least, he told himself, he didn't have to worry about catching anything, these days no small consideration. Look on the bright side, that was his philosophy. If you can find a bright side.

His Achilles' heel (in Holland's case, not his weak spot but his weak*est* spot)

was games of chance: poker, horse-racing, bingo, anything that involved gambling. He had adopted one hard and fast rule regarding them all: he shunned them, the way a diabetic would a sugar bun.

And so, when his friend Dartello asked him if he'd like to go to Atlantic City to try his luck at the casinos, his answer was a crisp, spontaneous --

"No."

"I figure we'll spend two days there, stay overnight -- Did you say NO, Bunky?"

Holland had never told anyone the truth about himself. He gave Dartello his standard excuse. "I don't gamble, Frank."

"You don't have to gamble, Bunky."

"What would I do all day?"

"You can swim in the ocean. Or you can go to one of the shows, they have several of them. You can watch the showgirls while I play the tables. What do you say, Bunky?"

Holland said, "No."

Unfortunately, like Charlie Brown, when Holland wasn't wishy he was washy. It took Dartello ten minutes to get him to change his mind.

After the show Holland looked for Dartello in the casino. He found him at the roulette wheel.

"How's it going, Frank?"

Dartello grunted. "Don't ask. Why don't you try your luck, Bunky?"

"I told you, Frank, I don't gamble."

"Hell, you can't do any worse than I've been doing. Here, I'll lend you one of my chips." Holland shook his head, but Dartello pushed a chip into his hand. "Go on. Five dollars isn't going to put you in the poorhouse."

Holland tried to give the chip back, but Dartello wouldn't take it. It seemed to Holland the quickest way to end this was to bet the chip and lose it. He placed it on red to win.

Black came up.

"Okay," he said, "now what do you say we go get something to eat?"

But Dartello said, "Try again, Bunky," and stuffed another chip in his hand.

Again Holland placed it on red. Black won. Dartello gave him a third chip. Holland placed it on red. Black won. And now Dartello handed him a fourth chip.

Holland knew he should just walk away from the table. But he couldn't. He was helpless; as Dartello kept stuffing chips in his hand, he kept betting them.

Ten times in a row he bet red. Ten times in a row black won.

He turned to Dartello. "Have you seen enough, Frank?"

Dartello stuck another chip in his hand. "We're not leaving here until you win one."

"Maybe I should bet on black," Holland said.

He did. Red won. He bet black again. Red won. Again. Red won.

After he had bet black ten times, red winning each time, he turned to Dartello and said, "Now, want to see something truly amazing? Watch this."

He placed a chip on red and one on black.

Zero came up.

"Want to see that again?" Repeating his previous action, he placed a chip each on red and on black.

Double zero won.

A murmur began to spread around the table.

"We'd better get out of here," Dartello said and, taking Holland by the arm, he pushed him toward the door.

Sitting on the bed in his hotel room, Holland did some calculations. Twenty-four chips times five dollars each... one hundred twenty dollars down the chute.

He looked across at Dartello sitting on the other bed. He saw that Dartello was quietly watching him, his eyes bright with a combination of excitement and wariness: the eyes of a scientist studying a new and uncatalogued strain under the microscope. Dartello spoke.

"What was that all about, Bunky? It looked like... well, it almost looked like you were expecting to lose."

Holland laughed. Dartello's expression remained solemn.

"Well, Bunky?"

"I told you I don't gamble, Frank."

Dartello's eyes demanded a better explanation than that.

Holland said, "The reason is, I never win."

"Well, you certainly didn't do very well tonight --"

"I. Never. Win," Holland said.

"Never's a long time, Bunky," Dartello said.

"A lifetime," Holland said. "Have you ever seen me win, Frank -- at anything?"

"Frankly, I can't ever remember seeing you gamble, Bunky."

"That's because I never win."

Dartello looked at him a moment longer. And then he said, "Pull up that chair near the bed."

Taking the chair from Holland, Dartello positioned it between the beds. Then he broke open a deck of cards.

"What's this?" Holland said.

"A test," Dartello said. "Stakes ten cents a hand. Five card stud. Sit on the bed there."

"Can't you take my word for it, Frank? I never win."

Dartello placed the cards on the chair. "Cut for deal."

After they had played fifty hands, Dartello was $5 ahead.

"Well, what do you say now?" Holland asked him.

For a moment Dartello couldn't seem to find his tongue.

And then he said, "Let's up the stakes!" A giggle escaped his lips. He put up a hand as if to try to stop it but was too late. "This is incredible! Do you *know* what the odds are against someone winning fifty hands of two-handed poker in a row? They're... astronomical!"

"Not when he's playing against me. I've told you, Frank: I *never* win. I have-*never won*. At anything that involved chance. I never even won a game of Monopoly when I was a kid."

"You must have won sometime."

"Never. Not at cards. Not at roulette. Not at the races." Holland shook his head ruefully. "Not at Monopoly."

"But you can't always lose. There are situations where you *have* to win. For example, suppose you bet all the horses in a race: you have to win."

"I tried that," Holland said.

Dartello stared at him. "You're not going to tell me they all fell down?"

"No. One of them won, and I got to cash a ticket. The only time in my life I ever got to cash a ticket."

"So you won."

"Did I? There were five horses in the race. I bet $2 on each. The favorite won, paid $3 even. I laid out $10. Collected $3. So, you tell me, Frank, did I win or did I lose?"

Dartello got up and started to stroll about the room.

"I'm hungry," Holland said. "Let's go eat."

Dartello continued to stroll. Finally he stopped and turned to face Holland.

"You have a talent, Bunky."

"Yeah, a talent for disaster."

"A talent," Dartello said. "You just haven't learned to harness it properly."

Holland said nothing.

"Any power has to be harnessed

The Loser

before it can be used profitably."

Holland still said nothing.

"For example," Dartello said, "what's to prevent you and me from returning to the roulette wheel, you betting $5 on red, me betting $100 on black -- and then splitting my winnings with you?"

"It doesn't work," Holland said simply.

"How do you know it doesn't work?"

"Because I've tried it. I've tried everything, Frank. How do you suppose I know that I can never win? If we did what you just said, I wouldn't really be betting on red, I'd be betting on black, and red would win. Back when I was in the army, I tried something like what you've suggested. We had this crap game one night, and I made a deal with this other guy..." Holland tried to remember his name. "Tucker -- that was it. " He had been unable to bring himself to admit to Tucker that he never won. Instead, without ever stating it in so many words, he had led Tucker to believe that the fix was in. "The idea was he would wait and see how I bet and then bet against me. Afterwards we were going to split the profits fifty-fifty." Holland paused. "To make a long, sad story short, there were no profits. I won my penny-ante bets and he lost his shirt."

"So you *have* won!"

"When Tucker caught up to me afterwards, he beat me senseless -- and stripped me of my 'winnings'."

"Oh." Dartello frowned.

"And now," Holland said, getting to his feet, "let's go eat." Dartello appeared not to hear him. He tapped the fist of one hand in the palm of the other. His eyes were faraway.

"There's got to be an angle," he said. "There's got to be *some* way of exploiting this talent of yours."

"Look, Frank, will you drop it?" Holland said, slipping on his jacket.

"*Drop* it?" Dartello turned on him. "One would think you're content with things the way they are. How about it, Bunky? You satisfied with your life?"

"I'm used to it."

"You wouldn't want it to be different? You wouldn't like to be rich, for example, to have the money to buy the things you've always wanted? Fine clothes. A sports car. A swimming pool. And women -- wouldn't you like to have women notice you for a change?"

"I can get a woman to notice me anytime I want," Holland said. "All I have to do is spill something on her." He sighed. "It works every time."

Dartello looked at him in disgust. "I don't know why I waste my breath on you, Bunky."

He reached for his jacket, and Holland thought that was the end of it. But not quite.

"On the way out," Dartello said, "I want to stop at the roulette wheel. I want you to bet $5 on red. I'll bet my wad -- what's left of it -- on black."

"I just got through telling you, Frank: that doesn't work."

"That was when you were cut in for part of the winnings. I don't intend to give you a dime."

"Then why should I do it?"

"Because I'm your friend."

Holland sighed. "You still might not win," he said. "Zero or double zero could come up."

"There are eighteen black numbers, and only one zero and double zero. That gives me nine-to-one odds. I'll take my chances."

Before hitting the tables, Dartello drew Holland aside to discuss strategy. They were to pretend not to know each other. Although what they were going to do was not illegal, if the casino got wise, it would, Dartello said, find some excuse to ban them.

As though not trusting that this was really going to work, Dartello began slowly, betting a single chip. But when he won and saw the croupier put a second chip on top of the one he had bet (in effect, Holland thought, transferring *his* chip into Dartello's pile), Dartello seemed to gain confidence. For his second wager he bet five chips. And then ten. Soon he was betting whole stacks at a time. In leaps and bounds his stake grew.

And chip by chip by chip Holland's shrank. Making Dartello rich was going to make him poor. Poorer.

He glanced around the table, wondering if any of the other players had caught on to what was happening right under their noses. They hadn't, of course. So absorbed were they in their own fortunes they wouldn't have noticed if -- well, seated diagonally across from Holland was a young woman, strikingly beautiful, wearing a skintight green dress that looked as if it had been painted on her, and they hadn't noticed her -- *that's* how absorbed they were. She had, Holland noticed, strawberry blonde hair which she wore shoulder length. Her eyes -- they were downcast and he couldn't make them out. He waited for her to look up. As though in response to his thought, she looked up and right at him --

"Wake up, Bunky."

Dartello's voice snapped him back. Mechanically he placed a chip on red. Dartello pushed his entire stake onto black.

Zero came up. Watching Dartello's pile follow his own sorry chip into the casino's coffer, Holland felt like laughing. Or crying.

"That cleans me out," Dartello said, after they had left the table. If he was looking for words of sympathy, Holland thought, he could hold his breath. But that wasn't what Dartello wanted.

"Looks like you'll have to pay for dinner, Bunky."

Holland told him to take a flying ... leap.

Dartello's mouth fell open. It was still hanging when Holland turned and walked away.

Taking his few remaining dollars to the bar, Holland bought himself a Scotch. While he nursed the drink, he mentally replayed the conversation he had just had with Dartello.

If he had surprised Dartello, he had astounded himself. It was out of character for him to speak up for himself the way he had. He felt good about what he had done. Only, while he was at it, he should have gone all the way and told Dartello to take a flying --

"Buy a girl a drink?"

He looked over his shoulder, and sitting there was the girl in the green dress. He looked back over his shoulder (surely, she couldn't be talking to him?), but the stool on his other side was empty. When he turned back, the girl had settled in next to him.

"Aren't you going to ask me what I would like?"

"What would you like?"

"A gin and tonic, please."

Holland signalled to the barman, ordered a gin and tonic for the girl, and another Scotch for himself.

"I saw you at the table just now," she said.

"I noticed you, too."

The girl shook her head. "Lady Luck was frowning on you tonight, honey. I mean, she was *scowling* at you."

"One of those days," Holland said

with a shrug.

The barman arrived with the drinks. Confusing the orders, he placed the gin and tonic in front of Holland and the Scotch in front of the girl. Before Holland could correct him he was gone. It was left to Holland to switch the drinks.

If he had stopped to think, he would have realized the situation was fraught with peril and acted with more care. Not that what happened wouldn't have happened anyway: no matter how cautiously he approached his morning grapefruit, it invariably squirted him in the eye. And now he spilled the gin and tonic in the girl's lap.

"Forgive me," he said. "I'm an oaf." The words, from much repetition, came automatically. He took out his handkerchief and offered it to the girl. Surprising him, she accepted it.

"Don't worry about it," she said. "It's an old dress."

It was most definitely not an old dress, but he was grateful for her lie. Most women in her place would have raked him over the coals. Using the handkerchief, she began to blot up the spill.

Holland signalled the barman for another gin and tonic. When it arrived, he made sure to put his hand nowhere near it. In his case lightning was known to strike twice.

"What's your name?" the girl said, handing the handkerchief back to him.

"Bob." He said it without thinking.

"I thought I heard your friend call you something else." So she had spotted Dartello.

"He's not my friend."

"Bob," she said, smiling (she had a lovely smile), "have you ever in your life won a nickel?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean."

So that was it. And what had he expected? He should tell her to get lost. But it was a rare pleasure having a beautiful woman sit by his side. Let it last a little longer, even if it was a fraud. In the mirror behind the bar, he saw other men watching him. Every one of them, he knew, was thinking the same thing: *What has that guy got that I haven't got?* If they only knew.

"I don't suppose he was going to share with you," the girl said. "No. Of course he wasn't. It wouldn't work then, would it? Why did you let him use you, Bob?"

The first two questions had been rhetorical, but the last demanded a response. He was stuck for an answer.

She said, "I know you'll never again let anyone take advantage of you like that."

"That's right," he said. *Starting right now.* "Is there anything else you want to ask me?"

"Yes. May I buy you a drink, Bob?"

"No."

"Of course," she said, "you're the kind of man who buys his own."

He nodded. What was she leading up to?

"And the lady's," she said, indicating her gin and tonic.

He nodded again. Now she was going to zing him.

"You're an old-fashioned guy."

"Yes."

"I like old-fashioned guys. Except they're almost extinct. It's good to meet one. Are you married, Bob?"

"No."

"A nice guy like you, not married?" She winked playfully. "You're not gay, are you, Bob?"

"Not in any sense of the word."

"Then how come you're not married?"

"I haven't met the right girl," he said.

"What sort of girl are you looking for, Bob?"

One who's breathing. One who fills a dress the way you do. One who when I spill something on her pretends it doesn't matter. "One who loves me for myself."

"I feel the same way. I would never marry a man who wanted me just for my body. I mean, what happens when the body goes? If I ever marry, it will be to a man who loves me for my deeper qualities." She sipped her drink. "I'm surprised you're not married, Bob. You really are a nice guy. I mean, most guys in your position would marry some girl just to exploit her, to use her to cash in, the way your friend was trying to do."

"It wouldn't work," he told her. *And now,* he thought, *she'll get up and leave.*

"Sure it would," she said. "Your friend was winning, wasn't he? Because he wasn't going to share with you. You would have to have the same arrangement with your wife. Whatever she wins, she keeps. The house, the bank account, everything goes in her name. You don't get to touch a penny of it."

"That doesn't sound like much of a deal for me."

"You're forgetting, Bob: you're married to the girl. You live in the same house, eat the same food, sleep in the same bed..."

"What's to prevent her from leaving me one fine day and taking everything with her?"

Turning on her stool, she looked him straight in the eye. "Would you be any worse off if she did, Bob?"

He looked down at his drink. The girl was right. Dartello had lost only because he had gotten greedy. He *could* have been rich. And -- indirectly -- Holland *could* have shared in his wealth. With his winnings, Dartello could have bought, say, a swimming pool. He could then have invited Holland to swim in the pool, and Holland could have enjoyed himself almost as much as if he were swimming in his *own* pool. Almost.

He noticed his glass was empty. He signalled the barman for another.

"This one's on me," the girl said.

"No."

"I insist. You may be an old-fashioned guy, Bob, but this is the 1990's and these days it's the woman's prerogative to buy a drink for a guy she likes."

When the barman brought the drink, she handed him a $10 bill. It was the first time, in the twenty-nine years he had lived, that a woman had ever bought Holland a drink -- had ever bought him *anything*.

He reached for the glass, half expecting his fingers to close around air. But the glass was real. He turned to the girl. She was smiling. Her eyes, he noticed, were light brown flecked with gold.

"Would you believe me, Bob," she said, "if I told you that you're the epitome of everything I've been looking for in a man?"

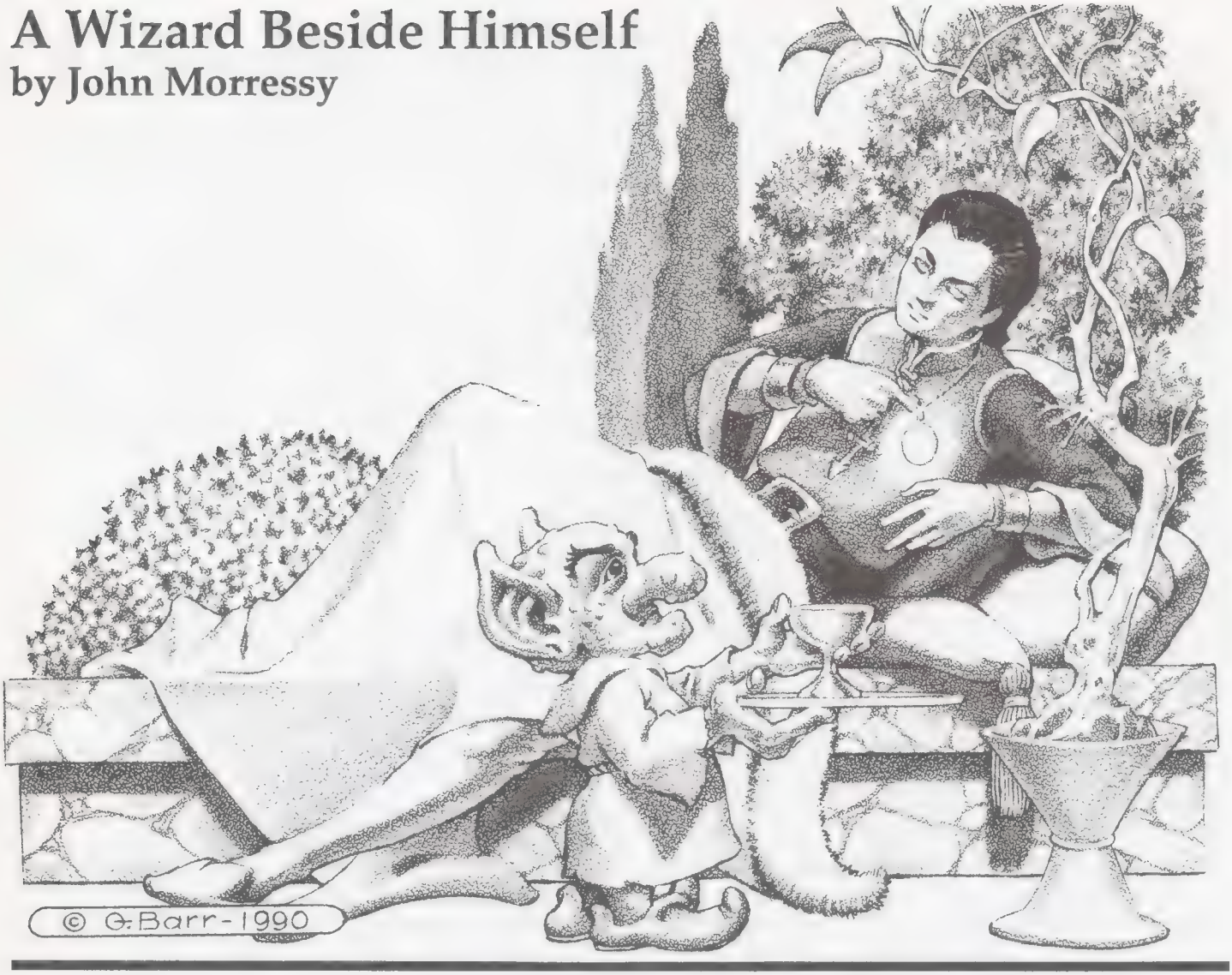
Sure, he thought. *And pigs fly.* How long would it be before she left him? A month? Two? That she would leave him one day, he was in no doubt. Not the rosiest pair of rose-colored glasses could hide that reality from him. Which didn't mean there wasn't a bright side to his situation: for however long it lasted, she would be his. And if -- when -- the day came that they parted company, as she had said, would he be any worse off than he was now?

He came back to the present: sitting next to this beautiful woman, holding in his hand the drink she had just bought him. He lifted the glass to his lips and sipped. Nothing had ever tasted as good.

Turning to the girl, he said, "What's your name?" ❧

A Wizard Beside Himself

by John Morressy



On still sunny afternoons in late winter, Kedrigern enjoyed a nap in the dooryard of his cottage. Sprawled back in cushioned ease, his feet up on a pillowed bench, a blanket snug about his legs, mittened hands crossed on his stomach, his face to the sun, the wizard simultaneously rested his bones, warmed his blood, composed his thoughts, and restored his spirits, while digesting his lunch and organizing his work schedule. These restful hours in the sun were precious to him. On wet or windy days, when he was forced to nap indoors before the fire, he was noticeably less cheerful and talkative, and sometimes downright peevish.

On a particularly fine day few weeks before the equinox, as he reclined in the sunlight, eyes closed, reflecting on a complicated counterspell he was working up for an old client, Kedrigern experienced a sudden perturbation of the medallion he wore at all times around his neck. It was not a warning, nor an appeal, nor was it a notification. It was a signal he could not identify, for he had never received anything like it before. He started up, shielding his eyes, and to his great surprise beheld an aged man sitting in the garden chair facing him.

The man was very old, but quite alert. One could tell that from a single glance into his bright eyes. His expression was positively merry, as if he were enjoying some delightful secret that Kedrigern did not share. He was warmly dressed, with high fur-topped boots and a long traveling cloak, a muffler wound around his throat and a great furry hat pulled down over his ears. Despite all the bundling up, his face was plain to see, and Kedrigern found it distinguished and inspiring of trust. He knew immediately and instinctively that this was a good and decent old fellow. Clearly he was also a very prosperous one, for his attire was of the very finest material and cut. The old gentleman sat upright, feet firmly planted, hands folded atop a walking stick of purest white, banded in gold and silver. He looked steadily upon the wizard, smiling faintly in a friendly, disarming way. Something about him tugged at Kedrigern's memory, but he could not make the connection.

"Good afternoon to you, Kedrigern of Silent Thunder Mountain," said the visitor, beaming, and quickly added, "No need to protect yourself, my boy. You're in no danger from me. I'm a great admirer of yours."

Kedrigern, who had just begun a quick protective spell, was taken aback. Rising, he said, "I'm happy to hear it. Always glad to meet an admirer. And your name, sir...?"

The visitor waved off the question. "Tell me, what sort of signal are you getting from your medallion?"

Age and distinction had their privileges, but this old fellow was really much too inquisitive. What could he, a stranger, know about the powers of the medallion that betokened membership in the Wizards' Guild? And where could he have learned it? And where did he get off asking questions about it? Kedrigern's displeasure must have revealed itself in his facial expression, for the visitor laughed softly and said, "I'm not prying, my boy. I'm wearing a medallion just like yours. Right now it's telling me that I'm in the presence of someone I know very well but have never met before; someone very close, and yet very distant; someone who represents a source of confusion, but no danger. And I'll wager that your medallion is telling you the very same."

Kedrigern drew his hand from his mitten and slipped it inside his tunic to place his fingertips on the medallion. After a moment he said, "You're right. That's exactly the message I'm getting."

"Of course it is. Do you think I'd lie to you?"

"No," Kedrigern confessed reluctantly. "I can't say why, but I feel that I can trust you."

"You don't recognize me, though."

"I very nearly do, but I don't know why. I'm sure I never saw you at a Guild meeting--"

"No."

"Or at a convention--"

"Never."

"And you've never been to this house, I'm certain of that," said Kedrigern. At this remark, the old man chuckled, but said nothing, and the wizard surrendered to his curiosity. "What is your name?"

Leaning heavily on his stick, the visitor hauled himself up from the chair. Once erect, he gave a little groan of relief and pointed to the door with his walking stick. The knocker rapped thrice. With a satisfied smile, he said, "You may invite me in. I would much enjoy a goblet of Vosconu's best wine, nicely chilled, and a *--what's that?!"*

The aged gentleman was pointing with trembling walking stick at a knee-high figure, mostly a warty head and nose, with great hands and feet and ears. It opened the door, stepped outside, and inquired, "Yah?"

"That's Spot, my house-troll. Sorry if it gave you a turn. It's nothing to be afraid of," Kedrigern assured him.

"It's a *troll,* isn't it? Trolls are dangerous."

"Not Spot. It's very helpful around the house, and quite loyal."

"How long have you kept a troll in this house?"

Kedrigern paused, counting uncertainly on his fingers, frowning with the effort to recall. "About eight or ten years, I think."

"And where's Buroc?"

"Buroc? That murderous barbarian swordsman?"

The old man's eyebrows shot up, and he said indignantly, "No, Buroc the loyal and faithful servant."

The poor old fellow was clearly confused, or badly misinformed. Kedrigern took his arm and said gently, "Come inside and sit by the fire. You'll feel better when you're all warmed up. I'll have Spot fix you a nice hot drink with plenty of honey and a pinch of--"

"Don't treat me like a decrepit invalid! I don't want a nice hot drink and a seat in the chimney corner, I want a goblet of Vosconu's wine!"

"Then you shall have it," said Kedrigern. "I'll have Spot look after your horse. Did you stable it?"

"I didn't come here on horseback."

"Did you walk?"

"In this weather? What kind of fool do you take me for? Come on, let's have that wine."

Once inside, the old man tossed aside his cap and cloak and unwound his muffler, revealing a luxuriant white beard. Unguided, he went directly to the fireplace in the main room, where he settled in the most comfortable chair. Out of consideration for his guest's obvious antipathy to Spot, the wizard served the wine himself.

"Where's yours?" the old man asked.

"Too early for me," said Kedrigern.

"Not for me." The visitor raised his goblet in salute and said, "To your future, young fellow."

Acknowledging the toast with a nod, Kedrigern leaned back against the chimneypiece, folded his arm, and said, "Don't you think it's time you told me who you are and why you've come here?"

The old man grinned. "And wouldn't you like to know *how?"*

"First things first. You're a wizard, that much is clear."

"Of course I'm a wizard. How else would I get here without walking or riding?"

"And you seem to have been here before. You knew about Vosconu's wine, and you came directly to this room. But you didn't recognize Spot."

The old man gave a little thoughtful grunt. "No, I didn't," he said.

"And you thought Buroc was my servant."

"Of course he's your servant."

Kedrigern shook his head. "He is not. I met Buroc only once. First he tried to trick me, and then he attacked me and was about to hurt someone very dear to me. I was forced to turn him to stone."

"You *what?"* his visitor cried with a start.

"You heard me. I turned Buroc into a pile of stone."

The visitor set down his goblet with an unsteady hand. "Oh dear. Oh dear me," he muttered. "Something is very wrong."

"Why? What do you think I should have done?"

"It's not that. It's... all wrong, somehow. This is not the way things should be. When I met Buroc, he was a white marble statue standing in the wilderness. He had been spelled by a wicked sorceress. I de-spelled him, and he served me faithfully for over ninety years."

"That's a long time."

"He had been powerfully spelled. Some of the magic rubbed off on him," the old man explained. "Don't you see what this means?"

Kedrigern scratched his chin. "As far as I can see, it means that there were two people named Buroc, and both of them somehow got themselves turned to stone. An interesting coincidence, I admit, but of no great significance."

"You young idiot, hasn't it dawned on you yet that *I'm---"* The visitor fell abruptly silent and rose from his chair as a lovely dark-haired lady in a robe of deep blue trimmed with ermine, a simple circlet of gold about her brows, flew into the room and poised in the doorway, gauzy wings fluttering.

She hung for a moment about a hand's-breadth off the ground, then touched down and said, "Sorry. I didn't know we had visitors. I thought you were talking to yourself."

With a cackle of laughter and a gleeful clap of his hands, the old man cried, "The pretty lady got it on her first guess, and she wasn't even guessing!"

Princess looked at the visitor, then at her husband, then back at the broadly grinning visitor, perplexed. "What did I get?"

"What are you talking about? Who *are* you?" Kedrigern demanded.

With a deep bow, the visitor said, "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Kedrigern, formerly of Silent Thunder Mountain."

"Wait just a minute." said Kedrigern. "I'm Kedrigern."

"So you are, indisputably. And so am I. Only I am you about two hundred and eighty years from now. Or, if you prefer, you are I, about two hundred and eighty years before I am. And who is this charming and intelligent sprite?"

"This is Princess. My wife," Kedrigern said.

"Your wife?! She can't be! I never married!" his visitor cried, collapsing into his chair.

"Well, that's your tough luck!" Kedrigern said. "I did."

"He certainly did. And so did I," Princess added, advancing on the old

WIZARD...

man. "I want to know who you really are, and what you want, and what you mean by telling my husband he's you and you're he and he can't be married to me! The very idea-- the nerve of you!"

"Oh dear me," the old man said, sinking lower in the chair. "This is worse than anything I anticipated."

Princess hovered over him, her slender arms folded, her expression severe. "It won't get any better until you start telling the truth," she said. She landed and began to tap her small delicate foot impatiently. Kedrigern stepped to her side.

The old man held up his empty goblet and looked at Kedrigern in silent appeal. The wizard refilled it. The visitor drank deeply, sighed, and then fixed an earnest glance on the couple standing over him.

"I really *am* Kedrigern, only I'm Kedrigern at a later point in life. That's the absolute truth."

"Easily said. How can we be sure?" Princess asked.

"Take a close look, dear lady. The nose. The chin. Shape of the ears. The eyes. Go ahead."

Princess stooped and studied him closely. After a methodical examination, she stepped back, looking disconcerted. "There's a very close resemblance. Except for the long white beard."

"Of course there is. I look like myself."

With a sudden exuberant grin, Kedrigern (husband of Princess) exclaimed, "Then I'm going to live for another two hundred and eighty years! At least!"

The old man shook his head. His expression was troubled. "That's what I thought when I came here. I was hoping to give you some good news. But now..."

"Now? What about now?"

"Now I'm not so sure. I'm not sure about anything. I think I should explain why I'm here."

"I think so, too," said Princess.

Kedrigern (her husband) drew up chairs for them before the visitor. With a gesture, he yielded the floor to the Kedrigern of times to come.

The venerable gentleman took a moment to compose his thoughts, and then began, "I'll be as concise as I can. That's not easy any more. So many memories. I start to talk about something, and it reminds me of something else, and that brings up other memories, and before I know it I'm off on a different subject altogether. Mind you, sometimes the digressions are a lot more interesting than the subject I started with. I've done, and seen, some amazing things in my time--"

"I know," said the younger Kedrigern.

"You don't know the half of it, my boy. You're still in your second century."

"You mean it gets better?"

"Better and better. Why, before you reach three hundred, you'll... well, maybe I'd better let you find out for yourself. Don't want to spoil the surprise."

The younger Kedrigern gazed at his wife in delight and wonderment. She smiled patiently and said, "I think we should let our visitor continue, don't you?" He nodded and turned to their visitor, who went on.

"I was talking about digressing, wasn't I? Yes, that was it. Oh, I do stray from the subject now and then, I admit it, but people are too polite to object, and so I just go on getting further and further from what I set out to say. Emras is accustomed to it by now. It's almost a joke between us. Just the other day, after the council meeting, he remarked..." The elder Kedrigern fell into an embarrassed silence. He cleared his throat and looked down at his boots. "You see what I mean."

"We understand," said Princess.

"Thank you, dear lady. I was saying...?"

"You were telling us why you came here."

"Of course. Forgot for a moment. Amazing the things one manages to forget. Only last summer, while I was working a very simple counterspell..." He paused, reddening. "Sorry. It won't happen again."

His listeners smiled politely. Their expressions, in truth, contained more of politeness than conviction. The old man began again.

"You must know that over the past couple of centuries I've done very well. Very well indeed. I am now Wizard Royal and Chief Councilor to Emras, Lord of the Bountiful Plain and the Intimidating Mountains. A very good king, Emras, and a fine decent man. Much better at governing than his father ever was. Back in Redinor's day, something was always... but there's no need to go into that now. As I say, I've done well: a manor by the sea, another in the hills overlooking the bend in the river, and a castle in the forest; a lovely suite in the palace; hunting lodges here and there; servants, body guards, horses, heaps of treasure, power, influence, the respect of all who know me, a comfortable coach... all the good things of life."

"It sounds as though we're going to have everything we could possibly want," said Kedrigern (the younger), giving Princess's hand a squeeze.

"Oh, yes, you'll have it all. And very pleasant it is to have, too. Very pleasant, indeed. Only..." The older Kedrigern hesitated and looked thoughtful.

"Only?"

"Well... I'm finding that as I live longer and longer, I need less and less of more and more."

Kedrigern (young) weighed that for a time; then said, "Even so, it's reassuring to know that it's there. It'll be nice for Princess, and it gives me something to look forward to."

"That's what I thought," said the old man, with an eager gesture. "My boy, I lived in this house alone for a long time. Too long. Until I got Buroc, I had no one to talk to but myself, and I was very gloomy company. Frankly, things were bad. For long periods, I lived practically hand-to-mouth. I became very discouraged. On my two hundredth birthday, I was ready to give it all up and become a hermit. But Buroc persuaded me to hang on, and in a very short time, things began to pick up. I left this place and traveled around the world. It was---"

"You traveled?" the younger Kedrigern asked in pained disbelief.

"Oh, yes. Went everywhere."

"Who made you do a thing like that?"

"No one made me. I'd been wanting to travel for years, and I found myself learning all sorts of things, meeting interesting new people, gaining confidence... wonderful experience, traveling."

"But that's impossible. I hate travel."

"He certainly does," Princess said, frowning.

"So did I, when I was your age. At least I think I did... Hard to remember exactly. Hard to believe I was ever so young, to tell you the truth. Anyway, I began to feel much better about myself, and became a very successful wizard. Then I met Redinor, and helped rid him of some trolls. He was impressed by my work, and asked me to become tutor to his only son, Emras. In no time at all, I was an honored member of his

household." The old man paused, smiling benignly upon them.

They smiled back. Princess finally said, "But why did you come back here?"

Their visitor looked at them blankly for a moment; then recognition and subsequent enlightenment came over his features, to be supplanted by an expression of surpassing benevolence. "Precisely to tell you all these things! Knowing how discouraged I had been, I thought I'd give myself a bit of good news. As you said, my boy, something to look forward to."

"Time travel spells are very risky," said the younger Kedrigern. The visitor dismissed the danger with a slight shake of his head and a careless wave of his hand, but Kedrigern went on, "They take a lot of magic, too—tremendous amounts of magic."

With an innocent smile, the old wizard said, "What's magic for, my boy, if not to spread cheer and encouragement?"

"It was very kind of you," said Princess.

"Thank you, dear lady. But I fear that it may have been a mistake."

"Why? I'm certainly encouraged." the younger Kedrigern said.

"Are you?" his older self asked solemnly.

"Yes, I think so. Why shouldn't I be encouraged?"

"You're aware of the discrepancies in our experience."

"Nothing to worry about. Things will work out in the long run," said the younger Kedrigern, with a sweeping gesture of dismissal.

"I find those differences disturbing. There is this beautiful and perceptive winged lady, your wife. I assure you that I never saw her before in my life. There is the incongruity in our recollections of Buroc."

"Buroc?" Princess said, startled.

"It's all right, my dear," said Kedrigern (her husband), taking her hand. "Our visitor had a different experience with Buroc." To the elder, he said, "What should I call you, anyway? I don't like calling you 'our visitor.' Too formal."

"Call me 'Kedrigern.' It *is* my name," said the old man.

"It's my name, too."

"Back at the castle, they call me 'Your Sagacity.' I don't suppose...?"

"No," said young Kedrigern firmly, and Princess shook her head.

After an awkward silence, the old man said, "Well, when we're in private conference, I allow Emras to call me 'Whizzer.' Mind you, I don't want that to get around."

"I would find it difficult to address a gentleman of such distinction as 'Whizzer,'" said Princess, eliciting a benign smile from their visitor.

"My dear lady, *you* may call me anything you choose," he said.

"How about 'Papa'?"

"Papa?" said Kedrigern and Kedrigern, with one voice.

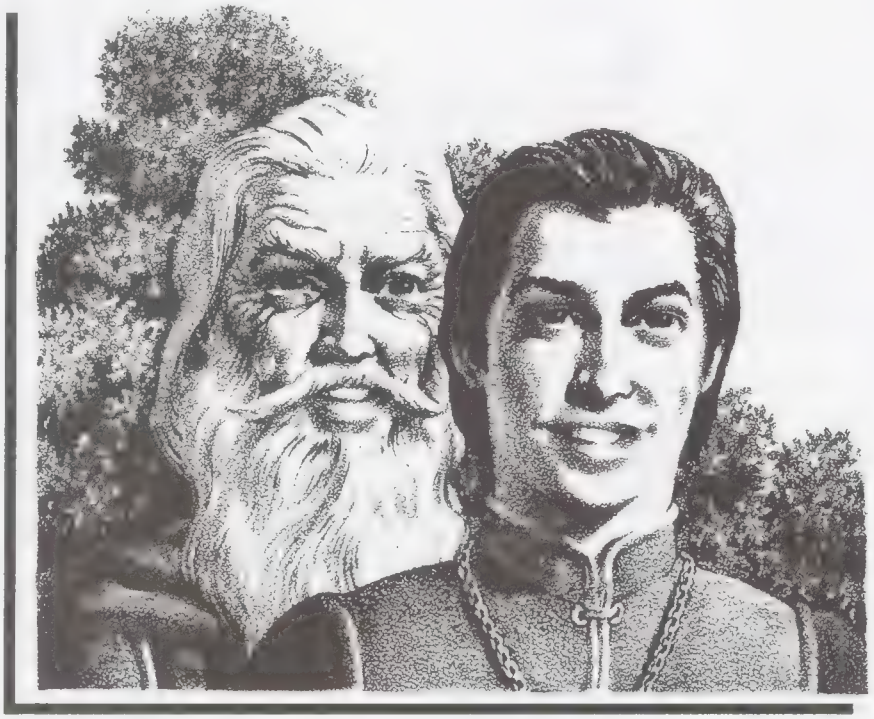
"Well, you're nearly three centuries older. And you've come back to do something very fatherly for your younger self. And you've got that long white beard."

"When did I grow that beard?" young Kedrigern asked.

"Late in my second century, I think," the old Kedrigern replied. To Princess, he said, "Dear lady, you shall call me 'Papa' if it pleases you."

"But I don't want a beard. Beards are itchy," Kedrigern said.

"Only when you first grow one. And I'd rather put up with a few weeks of itching than hack away at my face every few days for the rest of my life, thank you."



"All the same, that's another difference," said Kedrigern, and there was concern in his voice. "And Spot. You didn't recognize Spot."

"Correct. My experience with trolls has given me a very negative attitude toward the prospect of having one in my home. And as I look around," said Papa, "I perceive subtle differences in this house. I had no windows in the north wall, and this room was three steps up from the passage. No doubt a closer inspection would reveal others..."

The three looked at one another in uneasy silence. Princess, with a look of sudden inspiration, said, "How did you explain it to yourself the first time?"

Papa shook his head in perplexity. "What first time?"

"Maybe I should have said 'the last time.' The time *you* were living here, and your older self returned. What did you tell yourself?"

"A curious thing, dear lady. I don't remember."

Princess stared at him in disbelief. "You don't remember meeting yourself face to face? It's hardly an everyday occurrence, Papa."

"A point I have not overlooked. As I pondered the wisdom of returning to my past, I often wondered why I did not remember having, in my impoverished and wretched youth, received an encouraging visit by my successful future self."

"Wait a minute, now," Kedrigern interrupted. "Impoverished? Wretched? Aren't you overstating just a bit?"

"Relatively speaking, of course," Papa said. "After all, you have no castles, no palaces, no private company of guards... you make do with a single servant. A troll, at that. I'm sure you've very content here, both of you. It's quite cozy. But considering what awaits you... *well...*"

"It's enough for us, thank you," said Kedrigern.

Papa smiled tolerantly. "Once you've had everything, my boy, enough is nowhere near enough."

With a sharp glance at her husband, Princess said to their guest, "Let's try to keep to the point. You were explaining why you didn't remember meeting yourself."

"Yes, so I was. Indeed I was," Papa said, his expression grave. "As we agree, a meeting with one's future self is a memorable event. Hardly likely that it would fade from memory like an outdated spell, or the face of an unimportant stranger. It's true, memory plays odd tricks on a man when he reaches his fifth century... Why, only last summer, while I was working a perfectly ordinary spell for one of the... But I digress."

"Yes," said Princess crisply.

"The thought occurred to me that I might have spelled my earlier self into forgetfulness before returning."

"No, you don't, Papa. None of that," Kedrigern said.

Papa raised a hand and shook his white locks. "I dismissed the thought from my mind. No sensible wizard ever spells himself."

"I'm glad you still think so."

"After considering every alternative explanation, I was forced to conclude that, powerful as the impression must have been, I *had* forgotten it. After all, more than two and a half centuries lie between us---closer to three, actually---and they have been eventful times, of a kind to crowd the most capacious memory. Oh, the lands I have seen, the people I have known, the awesome spectacles, the dangers faced and overcome, the narrow escapes, the romance---forgive me, dear lady, and recall that I am not married to you."

"You're forgiven. Please go on with your explanation."

"Thank you. I concluded, as I have said, that from a memory so crammed with fascinating matter, even the most striking impressions will fade with the passing of centuries. And, too, by then I had become so intent on the prospect of revisiting my past that I could no longer be certain whether any memory of that period would be trustworthy. Would I imagine my memories, or remember my imaginings?"

"A unique dilemma," Princess observed.

"Indeed. And I saw no course but direct and decisive action. I worked the spell and came here."

Kedrigern broke the silence that followed by saying, with somewhat forced cheer, "Well, it was nice of you to drop by. I do feel reassured. Really, I do."

"I don't," said Papa.

"Neither do I, " said Princess.

"Well, to be honest– I don't, either," Kedrigern confessed. "I was just being polite. After all, Papa has come a long way at considerable risk, and used a lot of magic to get here and now it turns out that... well, that things are not the way he expected they'd be."

"Not everything," Princess pointed out. "This house is familiar."

"Yes. Tell me, my boy, who built it?"

"A group of workmen I rescued from barbarians."

Papa nodded. "That tallies. And did this rescue occur while you were living at the old tower?"

"Yes."

"After you had resigned from the Guild over the Quintrindus affair?"

"Immediately afterwards."

Papa stroked his beard thoughtfully. "Do you remember the very last spell you worked before that Guild meeting?"

"How could I forget the incident of the unsmiling Lady Dririam? And do you remember the one before that?" Kedrigern countered.

"That prince! The fat one with the warts who wanted a spell to make him--"

"And when I worked the spell, it turned his--"

"And then his father--"

"But I--"

"From under their very noses--"

"Out the postern gate--"

"And home on the king's own favorite horse!"

They sat grinning at each other like old school chums at a class reunion. Princess rose, smoothed her robe, and said, "You two continue your reminiscing. I'll tell Spot to prepare dinner."

Papa raised his hands. "My dear lady, it's most kind of you, but I cannot stay. The spell operates for a limited time, and besides, I have much work awaiting me. There's a council meeting tomorrow morning, a report to the budget committee, a speech to prepare for the veterans' convention next week... I'm terribly busy just now."

"Then you'd better make good use of your time here, and try to figure out why your lives are different."

"But we're finding that they aren't really so different after all."

"Well, if you're really Kedrigern, you've been my husband for nearly three centuries. Yet you claim that you've never seen me before today. I find that disturbing, and I should think that it might trouble the two of you *just* a tiny bit," Princess said, her cheeks coloring.

Papa laid a hand on his heart and said, "It troubles me more than I can say. But there seems to be no explanation."

"Wait a minute," said Kedrigern. "We seem to be in agreement up to the time I had this place built."

"Not about Spot and Buroc."

"No. You're right."

Both wizards were silent for a time, deep in concentration. At length, Papa said, "How did you find Spot, anyway? And when?"

"It was on the very day I left the Guild. I took the long way home, because I wanted to think, and I camped for the night in that meadow---"

"*I* didn't," Papa broke in. "I went directly to the tower. I remember that quite distinctly. I took the shortcut through the woods, and that's how I met up with those captive workmen."

"That's a definite difference in our experience. But after that... Do you remember Metalura?"

"Daughter of that idiot *Morgosh?* He tried to bash my brains in with a morningstar, I remember *that* well enough."

"Well, it was on my way home from Morgosh's castle that I met Princess," Kedrigern said. "I returned by way of the Dismal Bog."

"That's right, I did. But I didn't meet anyone," Papa said. "Oddly enough, I remember that day very clearly. When I came to the place where the roads diverge, I took the one less traveled by---"

"And that has made all the difference!" Kedrigern cried, jumping up. "I took the low road, and heard Princess crying out for help--"

"And I took the high road, and came home without meeting anyone," said Papa. After a long pause, he went on, in a subdued, wondering voice, "My decline began right about that time. Morgosh decided I had let him down, and starting spreading vicious rumors about my work. I lost most of my clients. It was nearly half a century before I got back on my feet. I went through some lean times."

"But I won't. Thanks to Princess, I won't," said Kedrigern, taking his wife's hand and grinning triumphantly.

"No. I suppose not," said Papa. He heaved a deep sigh and rose to his feet, leaning heavily on his stick. "I'd better be starting back. I think we've come as close as we ever will to explaining all this. It looks as though my journey to the past has been for naught. You've made a better job of my early life than I did."

"But you did well in the later part," Princess said, patting the old wizard's cheek comfortingly.

"Yes I did. Very well indeed." Papa looked around the cottage. "This is a nice little place, though. Nothing to be ashamed of. If it's all you want, you can be very happy here."

"Well, I'm not even a hundred and seventy, Papa."

"True, true," said the old man, clapping Kedrigern on the shoulder. "It's so easy to forget that. You've got plenty of time. Plenty of time. You're just starting out. It's those third and fourth centuries that are a wizard's peak earning years."

"Is there anything we can do for you before you go? I don't imagine you'll be coming back soon."

"Never, my boy. The spell works once and once only, and it's almost up." The old wizard hesitated, then asked Kedrigern, "There is one thing, though... Would you mind if I had a quick look at my old

workroom?"

"Anything you like, Papa," said Kedrigern, leading the way.

The old man stood in the doorway of the workroom for a full minute, looking slowly around, taking in every detail, nodding with satisfaction as he noted one thing after another in its accustomed place. He lingered over the work-table, then moved to the bookshelves, smiling at the familiar number of books, objects, and spider webs. With a little cry of pleasure, he drew out a slim volume bound in black. *"A Handy Book of Basic Spells!"* he exclaimed, flourishing it overhead like a banner. "This is the only one you need, my boy. Master this, and you're ready for anything."

"The others come in handy from time to time," Kedrigern said.

"Rarely, very rarely. Give me *A Handy Book of Basic Spells*, and I'll tackle anything. All those others... *Spells for Every Occasion, Isbashoori's Guide*... even *The Book of Five Blue Snails*... Do I have that yet?"

"As a matter of fact, I acquired it just recently."

"I'd like to see that one again before I leave. It's a beautiful piece of workmanship."

"Yes, it is. And it has spells that you won't find in *A Handy Book.*"

"Well, maybe one or two," the old man admitted, grudgingly.

"And counterspells that I've never seen anywhere else. In fact, it has counterspells for spells I've never heard of! It's a real treasure, that book."

Kedrigern located the book at once. It lay on a lower shelf next to something that looked like a large flat stone, but made an irritable squeaking noise and withdrew when disturbed. He handed the book to his visitor, who laid it on the worktable, opened it carefully, seated himself, and began to leaf through the pages.

In a low, thoughtful voice, Papa said, "I never did translate some of these counterspells and disenchantments."

"I keep saying that I'll get around to them some day."

"There never seems to be enough time," Papa said, with an impatient shake of the head. Suddenly he looked up at Kedrigern, with an expectant glint in his eye. "Is that jest book with the woodcut of the three monkeys and the innkeeper still on the top shelf? I haven't seen *that* for centuries."

Kedrigern, grinning at the memory of the picture, dragged a chair to the bookshelves and climbed on the seat. He began to search the top shelf, which contained books less frequently consulted. Coming upon one which he had completely forgotten about, he drew it out, opened it, and began to peruse the contents. After some minutes, the sound of a heavy volume shutting recalled his attention to his guest. He turned and saw the old man smiling up at him. *The Book of Five Blue Snails* lay closed on the work table.

"I'm afraid I won't have time to look at that picture. The spell is just about run down, and I have to be back in position if I'm going to return without serious complications. I've spent enough magic already, and I don't want to leave myself drained."

"If I can help--"

"No, no, wouldn't think of it, my boy. You've been extremely helpful. It's been a most rewarding visit, but it's time to go," said the old man, rising stiffly.

He made his way to the garden chair on which Kedrigern had first seen him, and after cordial farewells to his host and hostess, seated himself in the very same position as before, hands clasped on the top of his walking stick. He checked the position of the sun and composed himself for the operation of the spell.

"Don't you have to say anything?" Kedrigern asked.

"Not a word," said the old man, tapping the stick on the ground thrice.

"The walking stick?"

"Yes. I obtained it from a sorcerer about a hundred and forty years ago. It's come in very handy. Saves me a lot of talking."

"That's something to look forward to," said Kedrigern.

"I hope it all works out. There's obviously been a divergence in our lives, but maybe things will get back together. You'll love the castle and the hunting lodge. And Emras is a fine fellow, he really is," said the old man, beginning to fade as the spell took effect. "And when you find yourself turning into an ogre, use the counterspell on page twenty-one of *The Book of Five Blue Snails*. Got that? Page twenty-one."

"An ogre?" Princess cried in alarm.

Kedrigern, pale, asked, "When is this going to happen?"

"Not for some time," said the old man, now little more than a shimmering in the air above the bench, and a voice like a soft breeze. "Just thought I'd warn you. Least I can do to show my gratitude." And then he was gone.

Dinner that night was a quiet, thoughtful meal. Afterward, Kedrigern went to his workroom, and Princess soon joined him.

"He wanted to see my books. His books," Kedrigern said pensively, opening the cover of *The Book of Five Blue Snails*. "He especially wanted to look at this one. I've really got to get to work translating it."

Princess's question broke the thoughtful silence. "How did he know about that book?"

Kedrigern shrugged. "Oh, I suppose... Well, he probably... I don't know." He looked very solemnly at Princess.

"We've only had it for a little while, and we got it after we were married. And don't you remember how hard it was even to find out the name of that book?"

"Yes. You're right. So how would...?" Kedrigern began to turn the pages swiftly but carefully. With a cry of "Aha!" he flattened the volume on the table and pointed to where three leaves had been removed. After a moment of taut silence, he erupted. "The miserable thief! The sneaking, lying, old reprobate! What has the world come to when a man can't even believe his own words? What kind of man steals from himself?"

"A desperate man," said Princess.

"Do you really think so?"

"Oh, yes. He was very nervous. I could see that right away."

"I noticed that he was a bit unsteady, but I thought it was the effects of the temporal spell. It makes some people deathly ill. Especially people over four hundred years old." After a pause, Kedrigern went on, "But he seemed to calm down when he saw this book. And then he asked me to look for a picture in a jest book, and my back was turned for a few minutes."

Princess nodded. "Of course. He knows what you're like when you start poking around your bookshelves. While you were preoccupied, Papa removed the spell he needed."

Kedrigern gave a little start and flipped pages back anxiously. He let out a slow deep sigh of relief. "At least he didn't remove page twenty-one."

"It hasn't been translated."

"I'll do it right now," said Kedrigern.

"I'll help," Princess said.

Kedrigern looked down at the unintelligible marks on the page and shook his head. "He must—*I* must?— need that counterspell, very badly. I wonder what the problem is..."

"Be patient. In another two hundred and eighty years, you may find out. Apparently it all depends on which path you choose," said Princess, taking him by the sleeve and drawing him to a chair. "Right now, let's get this counterspell translated. I don't want to wake up one morning and find an ogre in my bed." ❧

A
J. Balbrock ©'90

Playing Dead

by Steve Rasnic Tem

It was the warmest October in Denver Jim could remember. September had been cold enough to get rid of most of the leaves, so when the heat came again there was just the brown grass, the dead flowerbeds, the stark tree branches reaching up into the empty sky. Suddenly it was like summer without the green, spring's restoration never having taken place. He felt as if he'd slept through two seasons. He hadn't even thought about Halloween. When his kids started begging him for help with their costumes, he'd been genuinely surprised.

Addie had asked for full makeup for her day-care's Halloween party, and again for her big brother's party after school. But Jim had held her off, resisted the seduction of tears and enormous green eyes, giving in only when he had to: now, an hour before his wife took all three children out on their trick-or-treating rounds.

Now he had no choice but to apply the white grease that suddenly paled the five-year- old's skin, the dark lines that aged her so terribly ("Adelaide is an old woman's name!" he'd told his wife when she was born, but Mary had still insisted), the smudges of black shadow to pretend that his sweet baby was dying or already dead. "Oooh, Daddy!" she exclaimed with glee when she finally saw herself in the mirror. Jim shuddered; she looked realistically awful. Her face appeared drained, her eyes sad even though she smiled. She squealed with laughter, thinking his shudder a part of the play. She reached for her favorite doll--the little princess with the tiny silver crown-- but he held her away from it, afraid the makeup would ruin the doll's perfect hair. That ruined hair would make Addie cry, and he couldn't bear it when Addie cried.

"Is she ready yet?" Mary stood in the doorway frowning; her good humor had vanished by the end of Billly's party.

"Just about. She wants fake mud on her fingers, and here and there on the clothes and face."

Jim had made a mix of dark face powder, ash, and mayonnaise in an old peanut butter jar. He ladled it on sparingly with a table knife. Addie changed her mind at the last minute and wanted it just on the backs of her hands, not on her palms, afraid some would get on the candy she collected. Jim wiped it off with a wet rag and started over. He didn't bother to tell her it would get all over her treats anyway--there wasn't any time for the whining debate that would surely ensue.

The fake mud looked remarkably awful: more than mud, more like some sort of pooled organic decomposition mixed with soil. It felt odd applying it so carefully to her body, just as it had felt strange working the paleness into her skin, the sickness, the hideous makeup of death. It was certainly a good disguise, almost a minor work of art. But he felt tainted and guilty.

"All done. You look...terrible." He forced a grin. Addie staggered forward to hug him. He leaned back involuntarily. Her face had the color of white fish floating belly up in the water. Her eyes seemed momentarily fixed. Her lips looked torn. He tried to grin again but the impulse caught in his throat.

"Hurry up, Addie!" Mary called impatiently. Addie reached for her princess doll as if to take it with her, then stopped as if considering, turned and ran past Jim. He reached out quickly to touch her, to catch her in a firm goodbye embrace, but barely touched the ragged hem of her outfit as she swept past him and into the living room. He picked up the doll instead and tentatively stroked its hair.

She'd never wanted to be anything really scary before. This was only the third Halloween they had taken her out, but the previous two years she'd opted for special store-bought suits: a princess just like her doll, and a kitten. Fanciful, fairyland outfits. He didn't quite understand the reason for the switch; he supposed it was just a sign of the times. What few Saturday cartoons he'd watched with Addie seemed to have a grimmer tone than the ones he remembered from his own childhood. But Mary didn't seem to think there was anything wrong with them. Times had changed; children seemed much easier with the darker sorts of fancy.

"Hurry--get your coat on. I want us back before your bedtime." Mary stood by the front door with Addie's bright pink coat hanging from her fingertips in offering. Addie made an incongruous picture: the tiny horror she'd become slipping into the cheerful toddler's coat.

"Kiss Daddy goodbye?" Jim said as she started out the door.

Addie turned, distressed beneath her makeup. "But it'll ruin my face!" she cried, torn between her duty to him and her need to maintain the illusion. Her lower lip trembled. He thought he couldn't bear it if she began to cry.

"It's OK," he said. "You can kiss me later."

As Addie smiled, Jim could see that a couple of tiny winged insects--small moths perhaps--had landed on her glistening makeup, no doubt drawn by the mayonnaise. They crawled across her face slowly, wings drifting up and down, but Addie seemed not to notice. He thought of them feeding and shuddered, stepped forward to brush them away, but after another warning from Mary, Addie turned and slammed the front door. He could hear her tiny feet pounding down the walk toward the car.

As they did every year, early in the evening the trick-or-treaters came in great herds, bunches of six or more, streaming up his front walk one group after another. He barely had time to empty the packages of candy into the two huge treat bowls he had set up on the table in the front hallway. He laid the doll down by the bowls, waiting for Addie's return.

"Trick or treat! Trick or treat!" Two little princesses held up their bags. Jim was pleased to see that a lot of the younger kids, acocmpanied by parents waiting at the end of the walk, still wore the less-threatening sort of outfit. He found himself being overly-generous with his offerings to anyone coming to his door as a miniature princess, fairy, cowboy, or miscellaneous furry creature. But the walking dead were certainly popular this year--he supposed because of all the "living dead" movies. Most of these costumes were plastic masks garishly colored, cheap plastic smocks covering the small bodies below. More elaborate head masks were worn by several--generic aliens mostly--with phosphorescent teeth and battery-operated red eyes. Often all the expense went into the mask: the kids wore regular street cloths to finish the costume.

As the night wore on, zombies and ghouls were limited to a couple of cookies, maybe three. After all, the dead ate little, or so he had always believed.

A group of five- and six-year-olds waited impatiently as he doled out oranges and raisins--all he had left that late in the evening. It was too late for them to be out anyway, he thought. And far too late for Addie. He didn't know what Mary could be thinking of--she'd said she intended to be back by Addie's bedtime. Hadn't she, or did he hear her wrong? Addie was probably staggering by now. Just because she could wear such a terrible, such a *grown-up* costume didn't mean...

"Trick or treat, mister. Trick or *treat*."

He looked down at the little girl holding up her bag. He'd almost forgotten her--he hadn't been paying attention. Now he blushed with guilt. He dropped three oranges into her bag, but from too great a height. She almost fell over, almost dropped the bag. Now her little arms sagged with the weight. He opened his mouth but didn't know what to say. He felt helpless.

She was dressed as a nurse. He saw now that they all were dressed as miniature adults--lawyers, police officers, business types complete with briefcases, postal carriers, soldiers--filling his porch, staring at him as he awkwardly dealt with the little girl.

They suddenly seemed far more adult than he could ever manage. Kids always seemed to be in such a hurry to grow up anymore, even the little ones Jim really didn't think it had been that way when he was a child, or was he just revising history? He wanted to tell them that they'd grow old all too soon. He wanted to tell them that playing grownup was playing dead--maybe that was crazy, but he'd come to believe that, perhaps a secret knowledge only a few people had.

These miniature adults intimidated him. He wanted to share with them these special perceptions, but he couldn't open his mouth. They left his porch slowly, the little nurse in the lead, disappearing into the darkness beyond the end of his walk. Where were their parents? They were so young. He thought of following them, of finding their parents, but he suddenly realized he was too afraid. Stupidly, he was afraid.

It was past nine, but every few minutes another costumed figure would appear at his door. He was out of food, so he gave them all money. At one point he had to break into Addie's piggy bank. He'd pay her back, but it was her fault, wasn't it, not being home when he needed her home?

This late into the evening, the costumes seemed cheaper, more minimal, worn haphazard, at times so subtle Jim had to really study the figure with outstretched treat bag, trick bag, to determine if there was, in fact, any costume at all. A white face in a black suit. A swatch of gauze obscuring the eyes. A flayed check. An emaciated hand issuing slowly from a tattered sleeve. A short length of old drape making a ghost. A faint patch of blue discoloring manufactured a dead child.

He felt ridiculous dropping money into the ancient, greasy brown sacks. What would they spend the money on? He had a feeling that it would have made no difference what he dropped into those sacks. Their job was to hold out the sack. His was to make the offering.

He'd lost track of the time. He looked at the clock and it was ten. He looked at the clock again and it was half past eleven. Something was terribly wrong. Mary should have called. He thought of the pins and razor blades some people inserted in Halloween candy and apples. Mary used to run the kids by the local hospital on the way home for the free x-rays they provided every Halloween, but he couldn't remember if they still did that anymore. He had lost track.

The clock was striking twelve. Addie should have been home hours ago. Mary should have at least called. And where were his other children? The ones whose names he could no longer remember.

A soft rap at the door. He checked his pockets--he had no more money. Again the tap, the rattling of the knob, the whisper of wind under the door. He could pretend he wasn't at home--other people did. But he would feel too guilty. And that kind of pretense always invited the tricks. He'd never had tricks played on him, all these years, but he had heard that some tricks could be bad. Some tricks could be awful.

He walked toward the door. His hand lingered over the empty treat bowls. His hand searched and found nothing. Then his hand found Addie's doll, grasped it, and carried it toward the door.

The door made no sound as he opened it. The screen eased back with the wind. The thin white arm came out of the darkness bearing the filthy bag, and the blank face of darkness stared, waiting.

He could have dropped a pebble inside, a piece of wood or some trash. The arm and the bag would not have known the difference; it was much too late. Instead his hand offered up Addie's doll, which made no sound as it entered the bag.

She won't need it. His thought betrayed him. They are much too late now. The dead have no parents. The dead have no children. ❧

An Interview with

Diana Paxson

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Diana Paxson is an exception to the rule that if you give a writer an opportunity to talk about herself, you can't shut her up. Diana is soft-spoken and hard to draw out. With a very classic face and long brown hair, worn today loose down her back, she has not changed much since I've known her. She dresses in earth colors---being an artist, they suit her---and has large, lovely blue eyes. She has been known to say, "More is expected of those of us who have curly hair (a line straight out of Peanuts).

I think of Diana as a protégée: I read all her early work, and I had the unpleasant task of telling her--after I read her impossibly sprawling, unfocused first novel---that it had very little commercial possibility; but though she sat there with the tears rolling down her face, she went away and rewrote it. It is now a series of six "Westria" novels, dealing with a society and a world based on ecology and the Society for Creative Anachronism. She now has had ten books published, including two fine contemporary urban fantasies: **Brisingamen** and **The Paradise Tree**. About the first of which, I said it was the only book I wish I had written myself.

We did this interview in the Fresh Start Restaurant in Berkeley---Diana and I have been having lunch there every Monday for a long time. Over salads and tea, we solve all the problems of the world.

One of the first things I remember hearing Diana say was that when she was a little girl, she used to make pots, then bury them so she could dig them up---practicing being an archaeologist.

* * * * *

MZB: I always think of you as a native of the Bay Area, but in fact you were not born in the Bay Area?

Diana: No, I'm actually from Los Angeles, but I went to Mills College in Oakland, and later took my Master's degree at U. C. Berkeley, and then when I married I just stayed here.

MZB: I know you have done art work; I once saw a children's book you had illustrated. I also remember you telling me once that you spent most of your childhood, from seven to twelve, drawing horses; and of course your art work appeared in our Issue #7, for the story "Fire Rider". Did you actually go to art school?

Diana: No. I did a minor in Art at Mills College, though my major then was in Medieval Literature. And my Masters also.

MZB: So you married my adopted brother, a writer himself (under the name of Jon de Cles), and then had a couple of kids.

Diana: Right, two sons. Ian, who is eighteen; and Robin is fifteen.

MZB: How did you find it possible to write with small children? Granted I always did it, but feminist theory says it can't be done.

Diana: Well, when the kids were small, I had to work outside the house, and wrote on my lunch hour, or after the kids were in bed.

MZB: Was there some reason you chose the field of fantasy, rather than choosing, for instance, to write detective stories or romance?

Diana: Yes; fantasies often have a medieval or quasi-medieval setting, and my interest is in medieval literature... I've always been a reader, and I loved fairy tales.

MZB: What is your own favorite book? What do you read for fun?

Diana: As a child I read Kipling, every horror book ever written, and archaeology; as a teenager I read Sherlock Holmes, and The Scottish Chiefs. I especially remember Poul Anderson's The Broken Sword. I remember going into the Santa Monica public library when I was in Junior High, and finding it on a table of new books, and reading the whole thing while standing there. I didn't even sit down. And I didn't notice the title or author, which meant it was a long time before I found it again. It changed my life. It came along just at the most vulnerable period in my life, and I began to get seriously involved with the field.

MZB: I know what you mean. I felt that way when I first discovered Startling Stories and C. L. Moore. And Dracula... Would you call yourself a feminist?

Diana: Yes. I discovered I was a feminist at Mills College. I learned to value working with women, and found out that I could do what I wanted to: study the Middle Ages, and do creative work---to use my mind.

MZB: Yes---that's my definition of feminism, even if it isn't the standard one of working outside the home, and competing in a "man's field".

How important has being involved in various groups been to your development as a writer?

Diana: I suppose I am an extroverted introvert, if there is such a thing. I have always found it easiest to learn things along with others, or in some cases to go out and learn things to teach others.

Probably the first group which has contributed to my writing was the Society for Creative Anachronism--- which has proved to be a marvelous source of information on early cultures. I didn't start the group to create a research tool, but it has turned out to be a wonderful source of people with expert knowledge on all sorts of useful things,

from boar hunting to forging a sword.

Later, I became involved in the neo-pagan and women's spirituality movement, and learned about writing and performing the kinds of rituals that figure so strongly in my books. The research into myth and archetype which I have done for these groups has provided useful background for writing as well. Above all, working in this community has given me a feel for what it would be like to live in a pagan culture.

MZB: Have you written any differently because of being a mother?

Diana: Yes, I think so. I really think it gives depth to my writing. A woman's, and a mother's life, is sort of bottom-line. You find out you can cope with anything you really have to. And, I think, writing made me a better mother---I never tried to exercise my creative impulses on my children.

MZB: How is it, coping with real life on one hand, and fantasy on the other? Which is more difficult for you? I dealt with Texas by creating the Dry Towns, which I used in The Door Through Space, and later in the Darkover books.

Diana: Oh, real life is much weirder. If I put real life into a novel, no one would believe it. Of course, each are different states of consciousness; but I manage.

MZB: What advice would you give to a young woman writer starting out today? Were there any jobs that particularly helped you?

Diana: Don't give up your job because you've just sold a short story. Have a part-time job that will support you; preferably something highly paid, by the hour. Like computer operating.

My educational background has been useful, because it has meant that I could teach at the local community college to augment my writing income.

After I graduated from college, with a Masters and a secondary teaching credential, I found that I couldn't get a job. All the teaching jobs were taken, and everyone told me I was over-educated for what was available.

MZB: I got that too. Every job I wanted, they said they wanted a minority with a grade school education. I was even turned down at the 1950's equivalent of a McDonald's---so I became a writer. I wouldn't leave David with anyone whose market value was less than mine.

Diana: I finally got a job at the YMCA as a secretary---a job I was glad to get, as I was five months pregnant and glad to get anything! Then I went to work across the street, at the Far West Laboratory, again as a secretary. After a year, I was able to move to a position writing training materials in Environmental Education, Native American Career Education, and Emergency Preparedness (for a variety of disasters, including earthquakes)... I understand that Julian May and Katherine Kurtz also had jobs writing educational material.

That job was helpful, because it taught me to work under pressure, to deadlines, in the middle of distractions, and to revise. I also had the experience of being a junior, so everyone had the right to tromp all through my work and make marks all over it!

MZB: What are you planning to do next?

Diana: This fall I'm going to Germany, for research on the German Saga of Siegfried.

MZB: A trilogy?

Diana: Well, it took Wagner four operas, and he didn't do more than hit the highlights.

MZB: That's wonderful. I remember my first trip overseas, to do research for Mists of Avalon. It was the first time I completely left my kids (then aged 28, 14 and 12, as I recall), and had uninterruped time to just write. I actually wrote the first chapter of Mists at Tintagel---and I never really changed it.

Have a wonderful trip, Diana---and thank you.❧

He was a farmer thane named Edward Aelredson.

He married a girl named Marian.

He watched his world die after Hastings.

They took his country, his lands and family.

Somewhere, looking for *mine*, he found *ours*.

His mother called him Robin.

Legend calls him Robin Hood.

SHERWOOD
by
Parke Godwin

Coming from WM. MORROW, Publishers
May, 1991

The Reluctant Vampire

by Deborah Millitello

Sharon woke with the worst headache she'd ever had, worse than her monthly migraines, even though it wasn't quite that time yet. This one was different. Her mouth and throat were dry. There was a grapefruit-sized knot in her stomach. Her golden eyes pulsed in rhythm with her throbbing head. Hunger clawed her stomach like a wild animal.

Sitting up slowly, she realized she was still wearing her party dress. "What in the world did Trevairin put in my tomato juice last night?" she groaned. "Probably slipped in vodka -- and after I told him I can't drink alcohol. I'm going to kill him."

When she stood, her legs felt like rubber bands. Cradling her head, she shuffled to the kitchen, opened the fridge, and took out a bottle of orange juice. The gurgle of liquid splashing into the glass echoed like Niagara Falls in her head. She popped two aspirins in her mouth, took a drink, then gagged. It tasted like mustard and cayenne pepper mixed with powdered charcoal. She ran for the toilet but didn't quite make it. When she'd cleaned up the mess, she trudged back to the kitchen and heated water for tea.

Pulling up a corner of the window shade, she saw crimson clouds in the September sky. A glance at the clock told her it was 7:33 P.M., just past sunset. "Oh, no! Mr. Jameson'll fire me for sure. No excuses."

The fragrance of the almond-mint tea soothed her anger slightly, as she inhaled the steam. Her breath swirled tiny tornados above the cup until the tea was drinking temperature. But when she tried to swallow, her throat tightened. She choked and tea splattered the table and her dress. She slowly wiped her mouth and watering eyes.

"Trevairin Drogoloh's going to wish he was dead!"

She stripped off her dress, went to the bathroom, and turned on the shower. The hot water felt good; she hadn't realized she was so cold. By the time she stepped out, she felt more alive and much less irritated. Blow-drying her short, ebony hair took a few minutes, but she couldn't wipe the mirror clear enough to use her curling iron. She threw up her hands and sighed. *Well, I'm not going over there to impress him, just to remove his head from his shoulders.*

The air outside her apartment was crisp and autumn-spicy. She knew the full moon was hiding behind the trees and buildings, just waiting for the perfect moment to rain silver light on the city.

Trevairin's place was in an upper middle-class neighborhood, usually fifteen minutes away by interstate. Sharon made the trip in ten. Screeching her car to a halt before the large glass and brick house, she jumped out, slammed her door, and strode to the front porch, where she leaned on the doorbell.

The heavy oak door creaked open. Suddenly looming before her were the dark eyes and swarthy figure of Trevairin, dressed in black Levi's and shirt. He didn't look at all surprised to see her.

"Come in, Sharon. There are some people I would like you to meet." Leaving the door open, he turned around and sauntered down the main hallway.

Sharon stood motionless, the words she'd practiced all the way over gone from her thoughts. Without protest, she followed him into his den. Four men and three women lounged in casual, dark-colored clothes. When she hesitated in the doorway, they all smiled at her.

Taking her hand, Trevairin led her to the room's center.

"Tonight we add another member to our family. Sharon, we welcome you." His lips brushed her hand.

She shivered from his touch. Suddenly, she regained hold of why she had come. "Look, Trev," she said, jerking her hand away and poking his chest, "spiking my drink wasn't funny or nice. I told you alcohol makes me sicker than a dog. And because of you, I've probably lost my job. I don't suppose it matters to you, but I have to work for a living, unlike you rich people."

A slow, toothy smile lit Trevairin's face. "My dear Sharon, you do not have to work if you do not wish to. You are welcome to stay with us now."

Sharon glared at him. "That's the last thing I'd do!"

One of the women -- who seemed vaguely familiar -- moved toward her. "Sharon, you belong here. You're one of us. We all have the same blood."

Sharon gaped at her. "Excuse me? The same blood? Are you claiming to be my long lost relative or something?"

"No," the woman said, a feral look in her grey eyes, "newly found relatives. Trevairin did put vodka-- and blood -- in your drink last night. You've shared blood with us, and now we're blood kin."

Sharon shook her still pounding head. "This is getting too weird. Goodbye, Trev, and thanks for nothing."

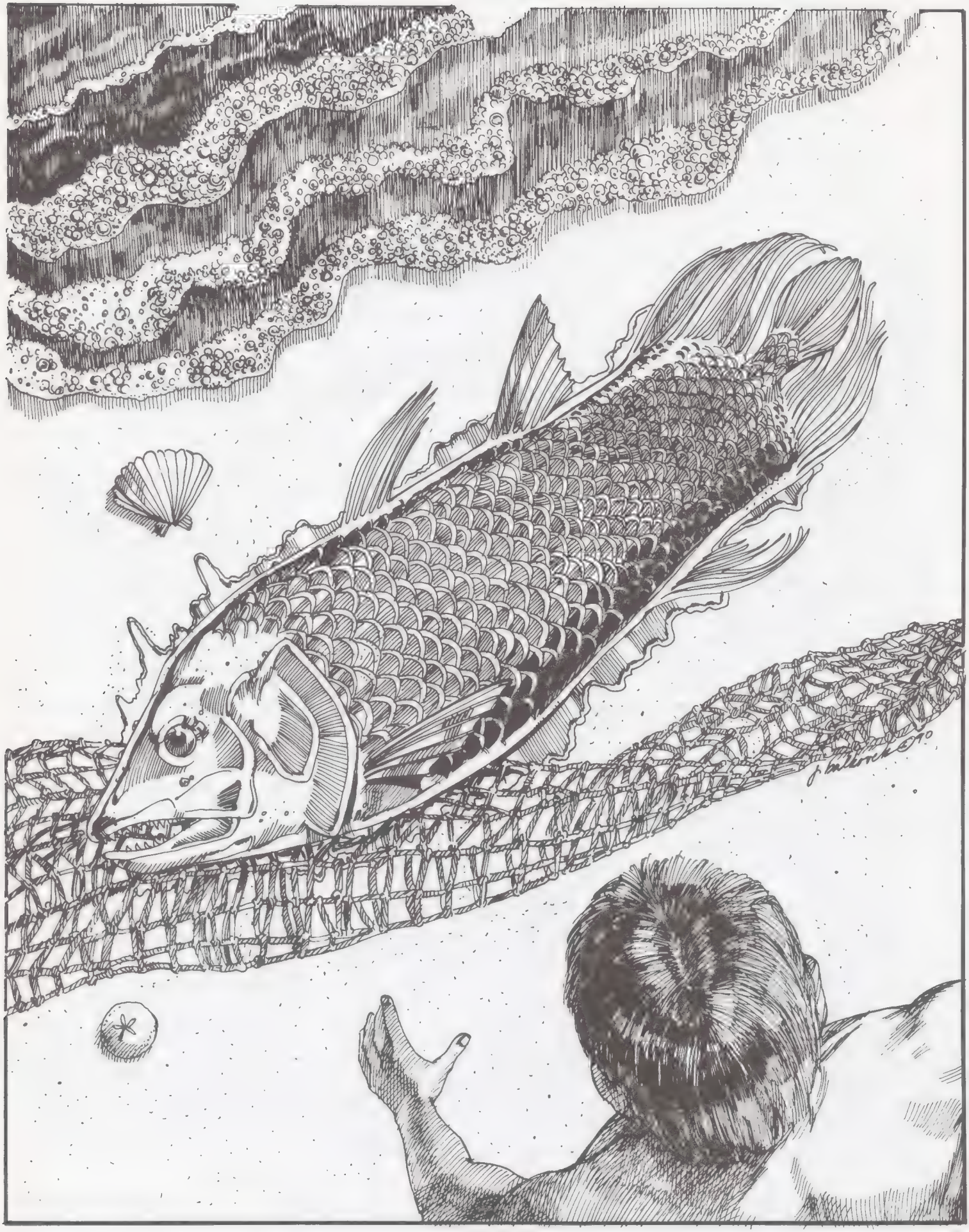
She turned to leave, but Trevairin clutched her arm and spun her to face him. His narrowed eyes gleamed intensely.

"Sharon, you are my bride. At the party, I made you like myself -- a child of the night."

With more force than she'd intended, she slugged him in the stomach. He doubled over, and she backed away.

"I'm not married to anyone," she began, icy calm. "If you cooked up a wedding last night, I can have it annulled 'cause I wasn't sober. As for being a vampire..." She flicked her long, sharp nails, and ran her tongue over her emerging canine teeth. She smiled as she read terror in their eyes. "Werewolves can't become vampires."

❧



Deep Catch

by Al Onia

It was after midday when Malagy began hauling the lines into his small boat. The relentless Fire-eye shone high overhead and the light breeze across the sea provided little relief from the heat. The first line was heavy; the catch would be as bountiful as the previous day's. Malaga was glad he had returned to the same spot. The humans paid little enough for their food as it was.

He looked as his browned arms as he pulled in the line. Under the smooth skin, his muscles started to ache, not constructed to handle the load of the longer human lines. He wished his son Andre had come with him. The boy showed little interest in the daily routine of his father. Malagy had named him after the first human he had met and the boy seemed more human than Tarinoan. Day begins early and stays hard for a Comoro Isle fisherman trying to make a living for his wife and son. Another helper, no matter how reluctant, would be welcome, Malagy thought. He freed the last of the fish and started on the second line. It too was heavy with catch. Malagy had enjoyed accompanying his father when he was Andre's age, before the humans had come to Tarino. Malagy could not understand the boy's endless enthusiasm for everything but the village life. There were voices of displeasure among the village elders concerning the unruly Andre. Malagy's wife Sudi echoed their feelings.

Malagy began pulling the third and last line. It wasn't as heavy but his muscles still ached as he brought it aboard. More and more line came in but the hooks were empty. Had the run stopped already?

There was resistance on the line, perhaps they were all on the bottom. As he neared the full length on the line he felt the tugging of a large fish. A Corlin? Malagy wondered.

That might explain the sudden absence of fish. He grabbed his knife to cut the line if he had to. Landing a Corlin was a dangerous one-man job; one slash from the razor teeth could take off a limb. Better to free it before it came too close, he thought.

His first glance of the prey assured him it was not a Corlin. There were no teltale serrated dorsal and tail fins. It was unlike anything Malagy had ever seen. Fear collapsed him in the boat. He let go of the line for a moment.

He quickly recovered and peered cautiously over the side. It surfaced a boat-lenth away. Half again longer than he was tall, Malagy guessed. He put away his knife and drew the line in. The creature was moving sluggishly and showed no inclination to attack the boat. It ignored his gaff so close to its gruesome head, perhaps blinded by the light. Malagy raised his spear and struck. The beast gave a shudder and died as he heaved it into the boat. He sat down again, shaking.

Why didn't I cut it free? he wondered. His curiosity had briefly overcome his fear. The thing had been helpless, trapped on the end of his line as surely as he was on the other. He sat as far away as he could and studied it. The blue creature had huge, lobed fins, almost limbs. The strange scales were too big for the size of the fish and the tail was too broad and flat. A grotesque, primitive mouth gaped open revealing small, pointed teeth. He leaned forward to touch the scales. They were rough. The eyes were vacant and soulless. It had come from near the bottom, he decided, from the long line and his limited knowedge of the depths this far from shore.

The other boats were heading to port, their catches complete. I will never forget the day I caught a devil fish from the deep, Malagy thought. Exhausted, he covered it and followed the fleet.

Andre was waiting on shore when Malagy entered the cove. What would Andre make of the creature? Malagy kept it covered as Andre helped him unload the rest of the catch for the buyer's apprentice. Malagy was out of the boat when Andre lifted the cover.

"What's this, papa?"

The apprentice saw what Andre had revealed.

"By the gods, look at this," he called to Armand, the buyer.

Shouts from nearby fishermen brought more onlookers. Malagy's wife Sudi came as well.

"What is it? What have you caught?" she asked.

Armand pushed his way through the crowd.

"Why didn't you show me this first?" he demanded of Malagy.

"We were waiting for you to tell us how much you would pay," Sudi said, "instead of him." She pointed at the apprentice.

The thought that it might be worth something had not occurred to Malagy.

"A fish this ugly can be eaten?" he asked.

Armand replied, "I doubt it, but the humans might be interested. Their scientists always seem to be looking for unusual things. This is a rare find."

Andre said, "Tell me what it is, papa."

Malagy spoke to Armand, "You find out what it is and I will sell it." He looked at Andre for approval but the boy had gone off again to look at it.

"I could give you a small sum now," Armand ventured.

"Loan me some ice to keep it cool and covered. You will find a human who knows," Malagy said firmly.

"The ice will melt in less than a day, but I will give you as much as I can spare, on account. Keep that creature out of Fire-eye's glare." Armand directed the apprentice to his wagon.

Andre was covering the monster up.

"Are you going to keep it at our hut?" Sudi asked Malagy.

"I'll keep it under one of the storage lean-tos. Fire-eye is nearly set."

Andre said, "I'll watch it for you, papa."

"You know nothing about fish," Sudi snapped, then relentingly, "but it will keep you out of my way for a change."

Armand said, "I will talk to the humans in Morone and see what I can find out. There may be others," he spoke loudly enough for the other fishermen to hear. "If we can get one to Morone

before it spoils, it could bring the catcher money." He touched Andre on the shoulder, "Don't let Fire-eye rot it, boy."

Armand left to finish his regular buying.

Sudi said to Malagy, "I think you should have sold it to him when you had the chance, before the Elders decide the village deserves a share, or worse, that it shouldn't be kept. The money might buy a new boat, one with a human-built motor. No one else needs to know what it is, why do you? You can't read the human books."

Malagy said, "Andre wants to know what it is."

"Andre the great fisherman," she mocked. "What if that things spoils before Armand can find out? Or tomorrow, everyone comes back with one in their boat? The money could make your life easier." She turned and chased the small crowd away.

A small hand touched Malagy's. "Thank you, papa."

"You may grow to like fishing yet," Malagy told his son.

That night Malagy laid on his mat with the choices spinning in his head. A new boat? For a son who hated fishing? When he finally fell asleep, he dreamed of the fish. He hauled the line in over and over again. The fish rotted before his eyes when he removed the cover and then it became Andre. Malagy woke and sat up. The room was quiet except for the regular breathing of his wife and son. He laid down and waited for morning.

Armand was back at the village early the following day. He had brought a human female with him. She was head and shoulders taller than Malagly. Small for a human, Malagy thought as he and Andre got close to the pair. She was holding a sheaf of papers.

Armand spoke first, "This is Sergeant Latime, she has brought some pictures of your beast."

"How do you do, Malagy," she said. She showed Malagy a drawing. "Here is your monster."

"Let me see, papa, let me see," cried Andre, reaching for the paper.

"In a moment." Malagy studied the pictures. One was a skeleton in rock. The other bore a close reseemblance to his creature. He could not read the words.

"I do not read. What does it say?" he said out loud.

Sergeant Latimer took back the sheet. "The fossil, or skeleton, is one the geologists found on the mainland and thought to be extinct. The reconstructed fish is what they determined it looked like alive, seventy million years ago. At the bottom, its name, Coelacanth."

Malagy could not comprehend how long ago that was. The humans had come fifteen years ago and the oldest woman in his village was no more than sixty.

Armand said, "Millions of years ago? How could this be the same type of fish?"

"We are still documenting all the life on Tarino. We find new species quite regularly. But this is the first living fossil that I know of," the woman said.

"Why would you pay anything for it?" Malagy asked.

She said, "The scientists can learn a great deal about life on Tarino before even your legends start from start from studying such creatures."

The humans had strange ideas, thought Malagy.

Armand asked, "Do you think they will pay for a dead specimen such as this?"

"Yes, of course. It is a pity you killed it," she said to Malagy. "Our communications are out. Do you mind if I make a record, Malagy?"

Malagy had seen a scannercam before but had no idea how it operated. He nodded and she moved the small black box lengthwise down the fish. Already it was turning brown and dull, the vibrant blue now only a memory for Malagy.

She got in her truck and spoke to Malagy from the window, "I'll be back after midday to make you an offer."

Sudi arrived as the truck left. "Offer? Did you sell it?"

"I have decided to sell it when the human returns," he told her.

"If it isn't rotting garbage by then. You should have sold it to Armand when you had the chance. That human could have given you money before she left."

Andre covered the fish while his parents argued.

"And what about him?" she pointed to Andre. "Do you want him slaving for the humans like you?"

"Together he and I can make it easier." Malagy doubted his own words but she backed off a little. The creature is changing her, he thought.

"I'll tell the other fishermen where you caught the creature, for a price. They will be interested in the money and someone else will catch another," she said.

Malagy played and talked with Andre while they waited for Sergeant Latime to return. The boy was full of questions about the creature, Morone City, the humans. Soon the truck rattled into the village. Sergeant Latime directed two of Armand's helpers to the creature before she had even stopped.

She got out and said to Malagy, "The scientists have offered a great sum if we can keep it long enough for one of them to examine it from the mainland."

"Take it to Morone and save it as long as you can," he told her. "Get your last look at the fish, Andre."

"I have the credits," she said. "If you have trouble with the Elders, I could authorize something else. What about a new boat? Hard to divide that."

Malagy answered, "Some questions first. If I may?"

"Always the questions with you, or your son. Alright."

Malagy could see Sudi coming in the distance with an Elder. He had only a few minutes with the human alone.

"The human scientists are very smart to learn from old and dead things?"

She nodded. "It may seem more impressive than it is to you, but some of them are quite smart, yes."

"The boy," Malagy motioned towards Andre. "Could he be taught the human knowledge?"

"You mean educated, in our schools?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I suppose so. You would have to move far away. There are no schools on any of these islands."

"Could he move to the schools without Sudi and I?"

"What do you mean, Malagy?"

He said, "Keep your money and arrange for Andre to live with another Tarinoan family near a human school. He can return here when there is no school."

Sudi had stopped to yell at Armand.

Sergeant Latime said, "There are others of your race in our schools, I believe it would be possible for Andre."

Malagy made his decison, "Please do it."

Sudi and the Elder arrived. "You have the money?" she demanded.

Malagy told her, "It has been settled. There is no money. Come, I will tell you about it."

Latime said, "I will let you know the details soon.,"

Malagy watched the truck leave with his monster. It would be difficult for him when the truck came to take away his son.

Malagy laboriously pulled in the heavy lines. The humans would pay well for this catch. His weathered arms ached but his thoughts were buoyant. The lines reminded him of what he had caught many years ago, in his old boat, not far from this spot. What had the human female called it? He would have to search for the yellowed paper. Better, he would ask Andre. That was the reason for his excitement. Andre was coming home for a visit. Home from university. A big school, Andre had told him.❧

Marion Zimmer Bradley
TALKS TO WRITERS

The Fine Art Of Collecting Rejection Slips by *No More Ms. Nice Guy*

Judging by what lands on my desk every day, quite a lot of you out there don't want to sell, or at least don't want to see your stories in print here. What you really want is to collect as many rejection slips as possible, as fast as possible. So here is a column for once devoted to the fine art of collecting rejection slips.

This may sound doctrinaire but hey, look, none of this is set on high in tablets of stone (though I believe much of it applies to all editors). These are just a few of my personal pet hates. I've never made a secret of them, but here they are spelled out. And until I get what I want, I can't buy it, and you can't sell it. The point is: know your editor. You could never have sold a fantasy story to Astounding/Analog, nor an article about flying saucers to Isaac Asimov. I am merely reminding you—in the clearest possible terms—what you won't sell to me. Not this year, anyhow.

Some people seem to have a real craving to be rejected. They don't even bother to read the guidelines. For instance, there is one guy who keeps on sending me spaceship stories, in which the spaceship is the most intriguing character. Now, this has been done well: Anne McCaffrey's **The Ship Who Sang** is a story of a cybernetic space ship who was really a woman; but this writer's spaceships are not in that category. So, in general, if your story is about a spaceship, spare me.

Then there are the plots which can only be done once—and they've all been done. There is the mad scientist with the colonists on the new planet, who turn out to be Adam and Eve. There is the protagonist who turns out to be an unborn baby (I committed that one when I was about 19, and really didn't know it had been done before; my agent told me maybe I could find an editor who'd been born yesterday). There is the vampire with a heart of gold who is really doing his victims a favor; and Deals with the Devil—even though I'll still publish a good one now and then, such as **A Dollar for Your Soul**— are generally pretty old hat.

My personal pet peeve: the good-natured female bandit telling her story in a tavern. I must have rejected this one a dozen times in any given week... especially the good-hearted old thief who just wants one more good score so she can go back to her home town and retire... But I still have a lot of incentive, too, so if you really want a rejection slip, you can try one more time to slip it by me.

Then there are a few more of my pet hates: dragons, unicorns, or wolves. These stories are all pretty much alike, and a cinch to get rejected, unless they are very original—like **Dragon Three Two Niner**, which was a new way of looking at dragons; and remember the baby dragon who needed burping? But as a rule, I don't like them.

In general, too, I prefer law-abiding protagonists, so any thief or bandit (as a viewpoint character) is usually a fast rejection slip. As is the computer story, even if the operator calls herself a wizard or sorceress. If it's got a computer in it, it's science fiction—at least by my definition.

You've been warned.

Or you can try writing me a letter telling me all about your series of (unwritten) books. Another good way of getting rejected (I could fill a long page with psychological drivel about 'the will to be rejected') is to write me a long chatty cover letter about all your dogs and cats, and your philosophy of Art. (Save all that for when Jan calls you for a bio. Knowing the way Jan talks on the phone, she'll not only listen, she'll even enjoy it!)

The fastest route to rejection is to send me Poetry. If it is short and funny, I might get a chuckle out of it—but chances are, I won't print it. (And absolutely no blank verse epics. Never. I promise.)

Yet another great route, if you really crave rejection and want to alienate me beyond all hope, is to send me back a story I've already rejected, explaining its merits at great length: why it really was a great story, and why I really should have bought it.

Better yet, do what one writer did: criticize the grammar in my rejection letter. As somebody once said: Nobody wants to step on a bear with a sore tail. But we don't buy his stories, either.

Of course, maybe you're not interested in selling. Maybe you just want a nice rejection slip.

And none of this is directed to the *Serious Artist*, who doesn't have to pay the rent — or who is independently wealthy.❧

Writers Talk Back:

We noticed that there are a number of letters to the editor specifically related to writng, rejection, etc.., and may not be of general interest to our readership as a whole, but may be of interest to our writers - so here it is a column just for you.

Benefits of Rejection???

Bob Liddil
Peterborough, NH

Each acceptance at ***MZBfm*** has taught me something new about writing. If there is one single dominant theme of acceptance vs. rejection, it would have to be storytelling. Each of the three of my works accepted has told a story. Each of the nine or so rejected

Writers Talk Back

works has on further examination failed on this point. Even rejection letters (and this includes the form letters as well) contain a lesson about my writing. Writers poised on the threshhold of acceptance might examine returned submissions with an objective eye.

Dear Bob,
When I did, I started selling. MZB

David M. Welsch
Boulder CO 80303

Dear Ms. Bradley:

First of all, thank you for your prompt reply to my last story submission. I appreciate the time and effort it takes to read as many stories as you do, even with the aid of a form rejection letter...

I would like to thank you again for your personal yet professional approach to editorship. I appreciate good constructive criticism, and I'm sure you don't get to hear often enough from writers about this positive aspect of getting a story rejected.

Dear David,

You elsewhere remarked that you had put as much characterization into the story as you could in 1000 words. But characterization has nothing to do with length. It's more about breadth, and depth... But what do I know? I just work here. DRB

EDITING...

E. R. Stewart
Robins AFB, GA

Thank you very much for the complimentary copy of issue #8, which reached me on the same day as my subscription copy. Everything looks wonderful, and please thank James Balkovek for his illustrations; I'm particularly taken with the very first one, of the book leaning on the axe, although the melty wolf is a flaming chill, too.

And thank you, Marion (if I may call you by first name), for your superb editing. When JB originally called me and asked if I'd mind that you would have to edit it, I think I surprised her a bit when I replied that I'd be honored, as well as curious to see how it would be done. I meant it, though, because I always want to learn, to improve, and there's no better way than to watch a true professional in action. My thanks for your graceful work on my little story.

Your treatment of writers sets a standard by which the whole publishing industry should be measured. If it's truly better to light one candle than to curse the darkness, then hooray that you've got the candle and are so generously sharing it with us.

Please let this find you and yours in the midst of all bests, andmay we all thrive.

Dear Gene,

I just treat you the way I wish other editors had treated me. –MZB

Light Fantasy / Prayers...

Deborah Millitello
Brighton, IL

How are you? I hope Marion is continuing to improve and is following doctor's orders. (Does that sound like an Italian grandmother? I am one, as of last January.)

Thanks so much for permission to make tapes of the magazine for my blind friend. She has problems finding enough people to read aloud to her, especially since she is a big fan of SF and fantasy. I've read aloud to my kids since they were old enough to listen, and I know how hoarse I get after several long chapters. Reading on tape can be done a bit at a time.

I'm finally sending in the Cauldron for the Spring issue. I like all kinds of fantasy, but I've decided I like light fantasy best. "Hubert the Barbarian" was wonderful! I know I've met him or his identical twin in several role-playing campaigns. I also enjoyed "Time to Diet" and "A Swim with a Shark". Give me more! "Change" was different, but I enjoyed it, too. It hurt to read "Power of the Peaks", not because it wasn't good, but because it was so intense, so gripping.

I can hardly wait for the short-short issue. Page after page of tiny jewels---what a treat! Take care of yourself, and Marion. Good thoughts and prayers are still coming her way from the Midwest.

Dear Deborah,

Thank you! Your thoughtfulness is certainly appreciated. You all did such a good job, that for the duration, good stories and thoughtful letters about what you're thinking are just what we need. Prayers, of course, are never wasted, but don't waste any time worrying. We're out of the woods. Now what's in the clearing? –MZB,jlb

MZB- Convention Schedule

Thomas Roche
Santa Cruz, CA

Sometime last year (I think it was in June), you had expressed an interest in forming a "coffee klatch" for beginning writers, consisting (if memory serves me) of a panel of writers who had appeared in *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine.* If that interest still exists, and if you think it would be worthwhile, I would gladly take part in such a panel and help to organize it.

If you are interested, please let me know and I'll write to the convention organizers.

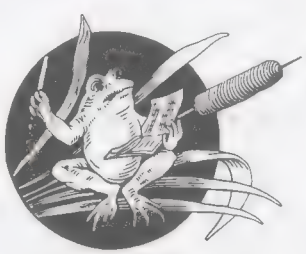
I hope all is well with you and the magazine. I recently graduated and hope to soon return to writing SF and Fantasy in a more zealous fashion.

Dear Thomas,

Thank you for the offer, I would like that very much. In 1991, if my health continues to improve, I would be interested in three or four local conventions. There is a move afoot to hold a **Darkover** *convention in the Bay Area next year.* **Hal Heydt** *has volunteered---there's one born every minute (my father used to say, "one born every minute, and two to take him"). I'm sure Hal would appreciate any help he could get. Write him, care of us, and while you're at it, let us know what you think... If it happens, we'll all be there:*

This year, I hope to travel to the **Darkover Grand Council Meeting** *in Baltimore on Thanksgiving weeked- God willing. If my health isn't up to it, I will be at* **Silicon** *in San Jose , CA that weekend - where I may be appearing publically for the first time as Editor and Publisher. Either way, I hope to see you ! –MZB*

For Next Issue we have a great letter from Mary Anne Landers/Rima Saret expressing her reaction to, among other things, Darrell Schweitzer's "Why Horror Fiction?" and another letter from Phyllis Ann Karr critiquing several stories.
Will we see a letter from **you**???



The Bane of the Red Queen

by Kit Wesler

"In the bleakness of winter shall a child be born who carries the mark of Selene; and she shall be the Red Queen's bane." For the first time, Queen Caramae could recite those words, and *laugh*.

She strode lithely around the stone chamber, nearly dancing in her excitement: Caramae, called the Red Queen in part because of the glorious hair that fell in ripples and waves past her shoulders, but more because of the bloody terror of her sorcerous reign. Her seneschal and bodyguard, Glaedwyr of Glaud, stood at the window, dividing his attention between his queen and the courtyard below, the latter nearly invisible through the sleet.

It was bitterly cold in the high chamber, whose windows were neither glazed nor shuttered, and Glaedwyr was bundled heavily. Yet the queen wore only a light gown. Glaedwyr glanced at her, impressed as ever with the sheer vitality of the woman, the fierceness that he had once loved, and then hated. He looked back into the sleet. Beside his hand on the window sill lay a crossbow, a sporting weapon, too light of draw to pierce armor but deadly enough in the hands of a marksman.

The Red Queen whirled toward the grim stone slab with its rusty stains that stood in the center of the chamber; then away again, too full of malice and glee to stand still.

"The prophecy!" she laughed. "The last hope of fools and romantics! Did they think my Art could not find this child?"

"There was less art in it, than thoroughness," Glaedwyr observed mildly.

She gave him an ugly look, then laughed. "A hundred mothers in this city due to birth this month. My Art found them all! Even those who thought to hide in cellars and attics. And my tower held them."

Glaedwyr nodded, still watching the courtyard, empty but for the grey weather.

"And the child is mine now!" the queen swept on, pacing feverishly. "They are bringing her now. And the blood of a child of prophecy can weave such spells as even I have not yet seen!"

Glaedwyr could not help glancing at the altar, at the blades and pincers and nameless potions on the scarred table beside it. He hoped that Caramae did not notice the shudder he could not suppress.

There was a knock, and at the Red Queen's snarl, the heavy door opened to admit a gaunt serving woman carrying a shapeless bundle. The queen cried out in triumph, snatching the bundle. Then her voice changed to a shriek of fury. "It's dead! The baby is already dead!"

The serving woman shrank back. "Please, your highness, it died before I touched it!"

But the queen did not deliver the expected blow. "Is it the one?" Caramae demanded, pawing through the cloths. The serving woman looked quickly at Glaedwyr, desperate and pleading, and the tall man nodded shortly, the only reassurance he dared give.

"There!" the Red Queen said. "The moon-shaped birthmark! It is the one!"

"Thoroughness always pays," said Glaedwyr stolidly. He turned away as the queen threw the pathetic bundle onto the altar and spat, "Get out!" to the servant, who complied in haste.

As the sleet fell more heavily, Glaedwyr began to fear that he would not be able to see the expected signal. But as the queen began to pace again, muttering furiously, he saw it: a thin flicker of a lamp, shone once, twice, and again, at the far gate. He quietly cocked the crossbow, and dropped an iron-tipped quarrel into the groove. But when he turned from the window, he found Caramae facing him, smiling. She held her hand breast-high before her, in a clawed gesture he knew signified deadly power.

"You fool, Glaedwyr," she said, low-voiced. "Did you really think I wouldn't know? That your men could lock up all the nobles who still support me, and disarm my Red Guard, and steal the talisman from the crypt, all without my knowing? I knew it all the time!"

With a sneer, she made a throwing motion, and said a loathsome word under her breath. But Glaedwyr merely blinked, and held the crossbow steady.

It was the first time he had ever seen her face turn ugly; the first time he had seen the shock and dismay of failure in those great blue eyes.

"Your power is done, Caramae. As it was foretold."

"But the child is dead!" she shouted angrily. "The prophecy is foiled!"

"I regret that we were not quite ready in time to save the girl's life," Glaedwyr said calmly. His grey eyes were as bleak as the frozen courtyard below him. "Better to be smothered on the stair than to be given live to your spells. But it is no matter to you, either way."

"But the prophecy--"

"The prophecy said that the child would be born," Glaedwyr told her. "No one ever said it had to live very long."

Nor did the chroniclers ever mention the iron-tipped quarrel that did, in point of fact, end the Red Queen's reign.

Weird Tales®

Subscribe to *Weird Tales*®, The Unique Magazine!

Each issue features great new horror and fantasy fiction by such leading authors as **Tanith Lee, Robert Bloch, Nancy Springer, Jonathan Carroll, Brian Lumley, Avram Davidson, Tad Williams,** and **David J. Schow;** plus artwork by **Frank Kelly Freas, Thomas Kidd, George Barr, Stephen Fabian, Gahan Wilson,** and more. Verse, reviews, interviews, special features. Color covers. Acid-free paper.

In the United States:i
☐ 6 Quarterly Issues: $24.00
☐ 12 Quarterly Issues: $46.00

In Canada and Mexico:
☐ 6 Quarterly Issues: $30.00
☐ 12 Quarterly Issues: $58.00

In all other countries, via surface mail:
☐ 6 Quarterly Issues: $33.00
☐ 12 Quarterly Issues: $64.00

In all other countries, via air mail:
☐ 6 Quarterly Issues: $62.00

Books from WEIRD TALES LIBRARY & other publishers:

☐ **THE WHITE ISLE** by Darrell Schweitzer. $18.95 (hc). An epic fantasy of heroism, horror, and a descent into the world of the dead, of strange terrors and hostile gods.

☐ **THE DEVIL'S AUCTION** by Robert Weinberg. $18.95 (hc). A blend of pulp-action, terror, and occult adventure in the tradition of Sax Rohmer and Seabury Quinn.

☐ **SPIRITS, STARS, AND SPELLS** by L. Sprague and Catherine Crook de Camp. $17.00 (hc). Probably the definitive work on the Black Arts, from remote antiquity to the present day. With wit and style, the authors explain why civilized men still turn to modern Merlins for refuge, protection, and inspiration. *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*: ". . . a fascinating study of magic, in history and in practice."

☐ **ON WRITING SCIENCE FICTION: THE EDITORS STRIKE BACK!** by George H. Scithers, Darrell Schweitzer, and John M. Ford. $19.50 (hc). A complete "how-to" guide for novice science-fiction and fantasy writers. Twelve stories, each a first sale, illustrate the main points. *Publishers Weekly* wrote: "This book will be a valuable aid to anyone who wants to write SF." Jack Williamson wrote: "The advice to the writer is clear, practical, and well-proven. . . . The comments from their authors give the reader a real feeling for what the writer does and how he does it."

$_____.___ : Total for books (we pay shipping)
_____.___ : In Penna.? Add 6% Tax.
_____.___ : Subscription

$_____.___ : Grand Total, by Check or Money Order; or Bill to my MasterCard or Visa:

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____

& ZIP _____

Card #: _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

exp. date: _ _/_ _ signature: _____

Mail this order to Terminus Publishing Co., Inc., P.O. Box 13418, Philadelphia PA 19101-3418
(You don't have to use this form: just send us the necessary information and payment.)

Feodor Felonis and the Thief

by Bob Liddil

Feodor Felonis tied down the last bit of rope securing the canvas to the top of his cart. Today, as on every other market day during the course of the last seventy-nine years, Feodor would lead his donkey down the trail, out of the scrub canyon and into Belestria to deliver rugs to the stalls at the rug bazaar. This day, though, he particularly felt the weight of his age. His steps were a little slower than normal.

Crouching in ambush, a young thief squinted in the harsh sun. As Feodor came into view, the boy's muscles tightened in anticipation. When the cart moved to within ten feet or so of his perch, he sprang down, dropped, rolled and came up, knife in hand, eyes blazing aggression.

"Back away, old man!" The boy shouted, "I'm taking this wagon and I'll kill you if I must!"

Feodor studied the youth for a moment and then, without moving away from the donkey, said, "What will you gain if you rob me of my cart?"

Caught off guard by such a calm response to his threat, the boy hesitated, then replied, "A cart-load of fine carpets to sell in the market."

"And what will you do when the coins from that sale are gone, rob someone else?"

Again the boy did not immediately reply; but then answered, truthfully, "Yes. Now step away!"

But Feodor did not move away, and instead queried, "Do you rob because you have no skills and cannot work, or because you are lazy and have no ambition?"

The question cut him. This time the answer was immediate. "I rob because I am hungry and in need."

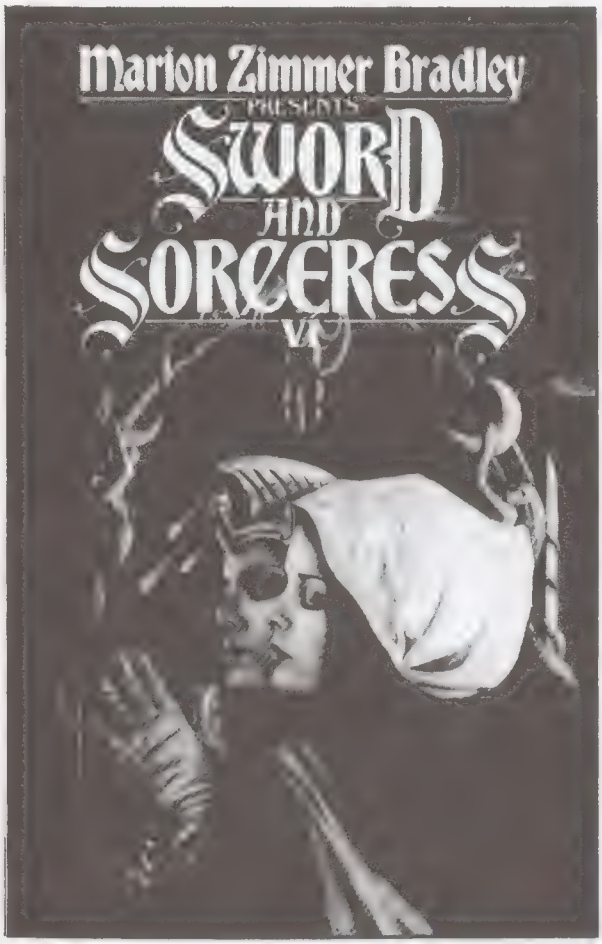
Feodor smiled. "I have a better plan," he said, "put away your knife and walk with me toward the city. I am a very old man who has no apprentice. You are a very young man who has no master. I believe an arrangement can be struck."

The young thief pondered this offer, then sheathed his weapon and joined the old man in walking toward the city.

So it came to pass that master weaver Feodor Felonis did acquire an heir to his craft, which was a thing that had been weighing upon him. ❧

NEW FROM DAW FANTASY

Warrior women and mistresses of magic challenge the evils and dreads of a bewitched world.



◆ DAW Fantasy /Original
0-88677-423-3/$4.50 ($5.95 in Canada)

SWORD & SORCERESS VI
Edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley

From a royal citadel ... to death's enchanted realm ... they rove the magic lands, defending those who cannot defend themselves, fighting against the forces of evil which, again and again, threaten to overwhelm the strongholds of light. They are swordswomen and sorceresses, were-women and wise women, and they will take on all challengers, working their spells and wielding their swords against masters of mayhem and chaos.

So rally to the banners of such seasoned campaigners as Jennifer Roberson, Mercedes Lackey, Diana Paxson, Elisabeth Waters, and their fellow strategists as they lead their troops to victory in the fantasy wars!

AND DON'T MISS

— 0-88677-359-8 **Sword and Sorceress I**
$3.95 ($4.95 in Canada)
— 0-88677-360-1 **Sword and Sorceress II**
$3.95 ($4.95 in Canada)
— 0-88677-302-4 **Sword and Sorceress III**
$3.95 ($4.95 in Canada)
— 0-88677-210-9 **Sword and Sorceress IV**
$3.50 ($4.50 in Canada)
— 0-88677-288-5 **Sword and Sorceress V**
$3.95 ($4.95 in Canada)

For our complete Catalog listing over 300 DAW titles in print, please write:

Elsie B. Wollheim
DAW Books, Inc.
1633 Broadway
New York, NY 10019

Distributed by
NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY
A divison of
PENGUIN USA

DAW FANTASY

Cat Fight

by Becky Sparks

Have you ever seen a talking cat? Well, I have. Not one of your cheap sideshow tricks, mind you, that staggers around on two feet mouthing garbled human speech and looking faintly embarrassed, but a *real* talking cat. You are interested? Well, perhaps a small tankard of ale to wet my throat...

So. This happened three years ago when I had just earned my sword and decided to set off on my own with the blithe assurance that only the young can know. I've always been good with a sword, if I do say so myself, with no taint of sorcery in my background. However, when I reached a small town one summer night, I could immediately sense something was not quite right, and that something had the indefinable taste of sorcery gone askew. I debated whether or not to stop, but it had been a long, hard ride, and both my horse and I needed a rest; consequently, I stopped at the small gabled tavern for food, a place to sleep, and a chance for gossip.

The tavern-keeper was a seedy individual who, contrary to the laws of nature, was as thin as a lath, with a drooping mustache and watery eyes. He wiped his hands on his dirty apron and glumly asked my pleasure.

Nobly refraining from telling him, "out of this benighted village," I cordially requested a place for my horse and dinner for me, with a bed (preferably clean). He grunted sourly at me, slopped a filthy rag over the table top to clean it, and left.

I leaned back on my bench, careful not to overbalance, and took stock of my present company. Ah, friend, they were as dismal a crew as ever I had seen, their unshaven faces as long as a stormy holiday; and their primary intent appeared to be getting drunk to a point of forgetfulness. Since it appeared that dinner was not immediately forthcoming, I shoved my bench back and wandered over to join them.

The one nearest rolled his eye at me and belched. "Swordswoman," he said dourly, "what be you doing here?"

Please bear in mind that I was *very* young with a good red-headed temper, and their mournful aspect irritated me. "I am a hero," I said grandly.

He nearly choked on his ale, and the word ran down the table faster than the contents of a broken keg. *Uh-oh,* I thought to myself, *Brixxia, you've done it now.*

"A real hero?" he asked hopefully, once he could speak again. "Not one of your dilly-dallying lordlings, but a *real* hero?"

This did not sound encouraging, especially as I had been practicing a grim and foreboding expression for the last two days. "Indeed, yes," I intoned, pulling myself up to my full six feet and resting my hand on my sword hilt, "and I am *gravely* insulted that you should think otherwise."

He shied back so violently that he tipped over, and I had to pick him up by the collar. Then he started talking. He was, as it turned out, the mayor of this benighted spot, and they had a demon who had captured a maiden. Or they thought it was a demon. Or, then again, maybe it was a ghost. Or something. Whatever its form, he owned sadly, it was having a very bad effect on business. What did it do, I asked him, with a qualm of doubt. Oh, nothing much, he assured me, merely carried off a few people who tried to interfere with it.

The argument of the form of the demon-ghost-dragon-or-whatever-it-was broke out again and gave me time to think. I wasn't quite sure I *wanted* to interfere with something that blithely carried folk off for breakfast, but I did have a reputation to earn, so I donned a suitably grim expresssion and asked what the job of removing their problem might pay.

Pay appeared to be a touchy subject. They whined and groaned until I threatened to leave; then we struck the bargain of eight pieces of gold, payable upon delivery of the demon, or (as they assumed lugubrious expressions) payable to my heirs in case of misfortune. Well, I foresaw no difficulty whatsoever (I was *very* young, remember). We passed around an indifferent tankard of ale to seal the bargain, the landlord bought my meal, and I settled down to particulars and my food. The demon (it was finally determined to be a demon, by some strange process) appeared to enjoy the company of heroes, because none of them had ever come back. They gleefully recounted tales of hair-raising screams, horses coming back with bloody saddles, all the standard fare designed to give would-be heroes nightmares. I lost my appetite (but fortunately not my dinner), after one particularly gruesome bout of speculation.

At this point I figured it might be a good idea to steer the talk into more constructive channels, and cleared my throat loudly. "So where," I asked, with a casual show of indifference, "might I find the demon's lair?"

"You must ask the cat," explained the mayor.

"The cat?" I echoed blankly. "Ask the cat?"

"The stable cat," he explained cheerfully, returning to his drink.

I cleared my throat. "Pray tell me how and why should I want to talk to a mangy stable cat?"

I was soon enlightened. The cat was enchanted, or then again, maybe not, but...

I lost my temper and grabbed the mayor's collar. "If you are but playing me for a fool," I growled, "I swear that I will cut you into small pieces and feed you to the stable cat on a silver tray."

The matter was quickly explained. The village was blessed with an enchanted cat, one that had appeared at about the same time as the demon and always graciously consented to guide heroes and would-be heroes to the demon's lair. I wouldn't believe it. I still didn't believe it when they carried the cat in, gingerly, to show me. It was a scrawny tortoiseshell with the longest ears, tail and whiskers that I have ever seen on a cat. Its eyes were narrowed furiously, its tail lashed, and altogether it did not look pleased.

"Speak," the mayor intoned grandly, prodding it with a finger. The cat promptly sank its teeth into the finger. While the mayor leaped about demanding bandages and spirits, I swear the cat grinned malevolently and lashed its tail harder. The man holding it set it down,

Cat Fight

very carefully, on the table and backed away. The cat calmly proceeded to clean its paws and flicked an ear at me.

Now, any down-at-the-heels sorcerer will sell you a second-rate spell to force an animal to simply mouthe set phrases, but this cat looked as if it both could and would speak on its own, given half a chance.

I cleared my throat and got the cat's attention. "Cat," I said sonorously, "I have come to slay the demon, and I pray you will give me your assistance."

Well, I had no doubt that the cat understood me, for at that it grinned in a perfectly diabolical way and licked its whiskers. We waited. So did the cat. At about the time I was ready to turn and accuse the lot of them of making a butt of me, I heard someone laughing. No, not some*one*, but some*thing*, the kind of laugh that raises the hair on your neck. I turned quickly and there was the cat, chortling away like a drunken soldier.

The mayor looked relieved. "Oh gracious cat," he intoned, "pray give of your wisdom to this foo-- er, hero, that she may save our town from destruction."

The cat proceeded to wipe a paw over an ear, still snickering. "I've seen better heroes come, and aye, seen them go too." This seemed to afford it great amusement for it snickered to itself for a time again. Then it placed both forepaws firmly on the table once more and studied me. "A female," it said, in tones of surprise. "Well, you fools finally did something right for a change."

About this time I realized that the cat was female. No male could sound that, well, catty. "Male or female," I growled, "what difference does it make, so long as I may swing a sword to good purpose?"

The cat gave a contemptuous sniff. "Why, males always fall to this demon. They have not the subtlety for it." She wiped her face again, then gave a feline version of a shrug. "Well, I guess you will have to do. In the morning we will go to the demon." With that, she stretched and jumped down from the table, accidentally taking some of my dinner with her. "Tomorrow," she mumbled around a piece of fowl as she marched to the door.

I sank back on a bench in a state of shock. Someone shoved a tankard into my hand. I belted it down. I began to get the feeling that even the demon wouldn't be nearly as hard to handle as that cat.

The next morning I knew that for certain. After a skimpy breakfast of cold porridge and ale provided by my host, I looked for my guide. No cat could I discover anywhere. The whole village (such as it was) trooped out to help me, awakened by my bellowing for the thrice-damned beast; not to mention the landlord whining and complaining about me throwing the benches and tables about in the course of the search.

"If this is but a jest," I snarled to the mayor, who had just shown up, barefoot and bleary-eyed, "I shall feed you to the demon myself at swordpoint."

He shied away from me, protesting his innocence, and got a table between us. "I swear!" he gasped, evading my hands, "oh, most noble, skillful, gracious swordswoman!"

Just as I got my hands around his wretched neck, something landed on the middle of the table with a thud and proceeded to pace towards me. I let go of the mayor, who was beginning to turn blue and gargle. "Where have you been?" I snarled.

The cat sniffed and pinned her ears back. "Trying to sleep through all that noise, but with you howling fit for a dragon, it wasn't much use. You aren't going to have to take a sword to the demon; you'll be able to kill it with your voice. Are you finally ready to go?"

I breathed heavily for a minute through my nose and counted to ten. "Look here, Cat," I said, very carefully, "I shall skin you for a new pair of gloves if you don't watch it."

The cat yawned, showing lots of pointed white teeth that looked in excellent working condition, then curled a lip at me. "Heroes!" she sniffed. "Are you coming or not?"

I snatched my horse's reins away from the man holding them, and swung up. "Where are we going?"

"Just follow me," the cat said and flounced briskly away. "You can't get lost if you just follow your stupid nose."

Ah, friends, as we progressed, the stink of sorcery and evil grew thicker in the air, explaining the cat's words. The trees were twisted gray skeletons, their groping branches hung wih an unsavory moss that waved in the gray haze of mist as if alive.

"Cat," I said, pulling up and stopping. "How far do we go?"

"Too far," said the cat with a snicker, "or not far enough, depending on how you feel about dying."

"Oh, nice," I muttered. "How did I come to get stuck with the only talking cat in existence?" The mist beneath my horse wavered and broke up as the cat stood on her hind legs and put her forepaws on my horse's knee. Strangely, the horse didn't seem to mind.

"The sorcerer," the cat said simply. "I was his familiar."

My mouth dropped open. "Sorcerer? Familiar?" I echoed weakly. "You?"

"Oh, tragic, tragic," the cat lamented, "how one of my fame and skill could be brought down by lowly mischance." Her tail lashed angrily. "He needed my assistance in calling forth a demon, despite my warnings. Did he heed me? No!"

"Uh," I said weakly, "uh, just what happened to this sorcerer?" I had the feeling that I didn't really want to know.

"Well," the cat began, sitting down comfortably and wrapping her tail around her paws, "the spell to call up the demon was a very tricky, multi-layered spell. Not only had we to call it up, we also had to lay a controlling *geas* on it, and spell it so it could speak. I mean, just what good is a demon if you can't speak with it?"

Feeling that some kind of response was expected of me, I opened my mouth. "Exactly!" the cat said promptly. "None at all! So, here we were, planted in this benighted place, and he cast the circle, and called up his demon. But mischance came with it, for just as he cast it, he was diverted, lost control and the demon escaped. Now I'm stuck here, leading heroes to the demon until such time as a hero may slay it and right the spell."

"So, what happened to the sorcerer?" I asked again, determinedly.

"Oh, I don't know just what happened to him, but I don't figure he'll ever get diverted calling up another demon." The cat was briskly standing and stretching.

"I guess it was a little surprising," I ventured weakly, "when you started talking. But you don't have to be a stable cat, you know. I mean, a sideshow..."

"You idiot. Familiars can always speak. How could we assist otherwise?" The cat gave me a contemptuous green-eyed glare and moved on. I followed the banner of her tail sheepishly down the rutted trail while the trees reached out for us with gnarled fingers and waving tendrils of moss. On the whole, friends, not a place that I would choose for a picnic. I was even glad for the company of a cat in such a wretched place.

Anyway, after about an hour or so, we broke out of the trees and mist into a clearing that didn't appear to be much of an improvement, due to all the bones. I stiffened my back and put on a suitably fierce glare. Maybe I could just talk the demon into leaving...

There was a scuffling sound and the demon shambled out of a cave on the other side of the clearing. It was ugly, as gray and gnarled as the trees, and it

stank. When it saw me it grinned, showing an extremely functional set of teeth, and started toward me, waving arms the size of tree trunks.

I dismounted unhappily from my skittish horse and drew my sword. All at once I was very dissatisfied with my bargain. Maybe I should have asked for twelve pieces of gold...

Suddenly, there was a shriek, and a beautiful girl, dressed in rags of finery, her long golden hair tangled and dishevelled, stumbled out of the cave and ran toward me. She ran past the demon and fell at my knees, raising beseeching hands. "Save me," she cried. "Please, great hero, an evil sorcerer left me here with this creature until a hero could free me..." She buried her face in her hands and began to weep prettily.

I realized my mouth was open and shut it with a snap. "Uh," I said, intelligently, and lowered my sword. "Uh, of course I'll save you." Frankly, I detested her at first sight. Whether it was jealousy, envy, or simply a gut reaction to someone who could cry and not have their eyes turn all red and bleary, I didn't know. I just knew I hated her. Quickly, I recited my vows again to myself; you know, the ones about destroying evil, helping the innocent in need, etc., etc. "Of course I'll rescue you," I said resignedly.

Taking a firmer grip on my sword, I stepped past her and faced the demon unenthusiastically. "Prepare to die," I intoned grimly.

"Fool," the cat suddenly hissed from behind me. "Thrice fool! Great stupid oaf!"

Startled, I spun in time to see the cat leap from the branch she had been perched upon and run past the girl. The girl was still kneeling on the ground, but her hands were no longer covering her face. Instead they were growing claws and reaching for my legs. The cat lashed out with a paw full of scimitars and the girl shrieked, clutching her arm. From between her fingers dripped a thick green blood, and death looked out at me from her eyes.

"Quick," yowled the cat, as the girl started to pull herself up. "Kill it now!"

My blow was reflexive and took the head off the creature just in time to meet the demon who shambled toward me. "Wait," the cat hissed, her tail still fluffed and stiff. "Look."

The demon was changing, shifting form like a candle left in the sun too long. I blinked in confusion and looked at the cat. "What's going on?" I demanded indignantly. This was not true to form for a rescue of a maiden.

The cat bent to lick smooth the ruffled fur along her backbone. "I suspect," she sniffed, "that with the death of the true demon, the spell is righting itself."

I placed the tip of my sword warily on the ground and leaned on the hilt. "Then just who," I asked dryly, "or what, is that?"

The false demon had changed into the form of a man wearing the remains of a black robe and a sheepish expression. "Uh," he said weakly. "Hello."

I picked up the sword again. "Do I kill him too?" I asked, disgusted.

The man blanched and the cat snickered. "How the mighty have fallen," she remarked to the sky. "This is my old master." Her whiskers twitched in a feline grin.

"Oh." Feeling rather foolish, I lowered the sword again. "Oh. So what are you going to do now?"

"I think," the cat said, still staring vaguely up at the sky, "that I may travel a little and see the world."

"Wait a minute," the man squawked. "You're my familiar. I demand your help in---"

The cat looked at him thoughtfully. "I believe, however, you may be wise in wishing to lop off his head too, though, just in case. I mean, he *was* responsible for all this mess."

I hefted my sword, grinning, and he began backing up. "Maybe I was just a little hasty," he began; then tripped over one of the bones strewn on the ground and fell on his prat. "I mean, certainly we can come to some sort of civilized agreement."

"Good," the cat purred. "I knew you could be reasonable if you tried. We do have certain expenses, after all."

"In the cave," he said promptly. "The demon hid all the plunder she collected. Would that suffice?"

"We will consider it," the cat said, standing and stretching luxuriously. "Lead on." She paused a moment beside the body of the true demon, sniffed it and looked up at me. "Not bad. Clumsy, but not too bad."

"Next time you try it," I snarled, wiping off my sword.

The cat sniffed disdainfully and sauntered past me, into the cave. "In here," she called, her voice distorted by echoes. With one final glance at the mess behind me, I sheathed my sword and followed her.

The cat was sitting smugly amid a heap of armor, coins, jewels, rotting leather and a few bones. The demon had obviously not been a tidy housekeeper. The sorcerer was standing nervously at the edge of the pile, kicking some of the jumble out of the way. "This is all her plunder." he ventured cautiously.

"Humph," I said intelligently, turning the mess over with the toe of my boot. "Well, this on top of the bounty makes a pretty good haul, I suppose."

He looked relieved. "Now, if you don't mind, I wish only to go have a bath and change clothes. Thanks for everything. Help yourself." As he spoke, he shimmered and was gone.

"In a bit of a hurry, wasn't he?" I started picking through the mess around my feet for something to carry things in. "Aren't you going with him?"

"Not bloody likely." The cat yawned and managed a feline sneer. "As sorcerers go," she sniffed, "he wasn't the best, or the smartest. Definitely not up to my standards."

"Why weren't any of the other heroes able to kill her?" I asked, giving up looking for a bag, and spreading my cloak out on the ground to hold stuff. "I mean, she played the part fine, but she never fooled *me*." There was no way I was going to let any flea-bitten cat think that I, of all people, could be fooled by a devious demon.

The cat snickered. "Funny, I rather thought otherwise."

"Tell me something, Cat." I looked up from my work. "Why didn't you help any of the others?"

"I tried." She sniffed disdainfully. "As soon as they saw her, they wouldn't even listen to me. I nearly got my head lopped off a couple of times for my trouble when they accused me of insulting her."

"You know, Cat," I mused, "we make a pretty good team, don't we?"

She sneezed and began cleaning her face with a front paw. "My brains and your brawn, I suppose. But the idea does show promise."

I studied the unprepossessing roof of the cave. "If you wanted," I ventured disinterestedly, "you could travel with me."

"Why should I want to do that?" she asked, pausing in her washing. "What's in it for me?"

"Adventure," I said grandly, waving my hand in the air. "Travel. Excitement."

The cat groaned. "Spare me," she sniffed. "A little mouse liver *pate* and cream would appeal more. But I do seem to be rather at loose ends at the moment. It might be interesting. It might even have possibilities. Maybe I'll try it."

And she did. On the whole, we're a pretty good team. If you don't believe me, friends, ask her. Here she is; ask her. Cat, say something. Cat? Oh, come on, Cat, stop it...❧

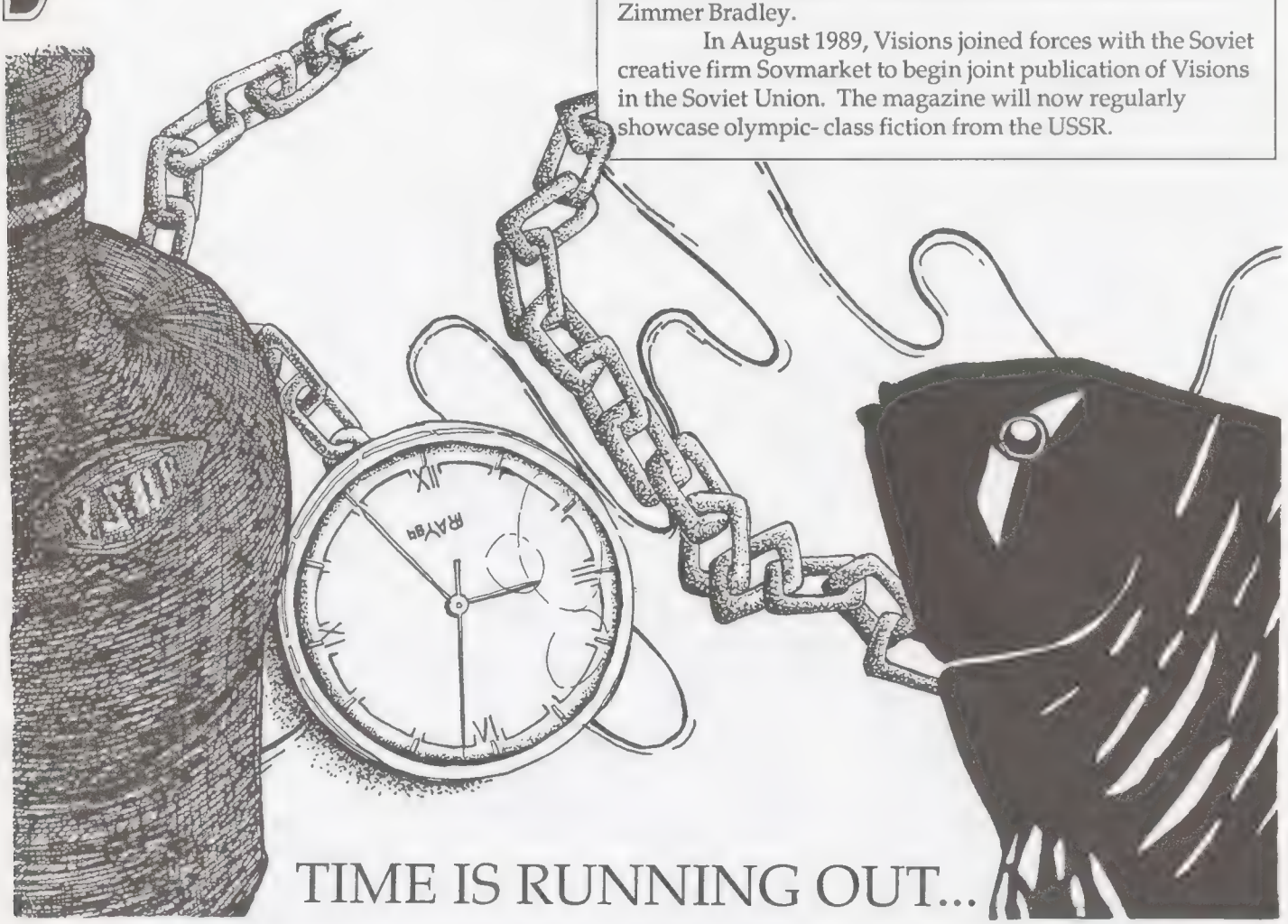
VISIONS™

the intercollegiate magazine of speculative fiction and fantasy

Suscribe Now To A Whole New Kind Of Magazine!

Visions, the intercollegiate magazine of speculative fiction and fantasy, brings you the best of fiction and artwork by young authors and artists the world over. Visions' network of Campus Representatives links writers and artists in the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, West Germany, and New Zealand. Our seasonal issues also feature interviews and articles by outstanding authors like Isaac Asimov, Robert Silverberg, Carl Sagan, and Marion Zimmer Bradley.

In August 1989, Visions joined forces with the Soviet creative firm Sovmarket to begin joint publication of Visions in the Soviet Union. The magazine will now regularly showcase olympic- class fiction from the USSR.



TIME IS RUNNING OUT...

Subscribe now to receive the next three seasonal issues of *Visions*.

PLEASE SEND ME THE NEXT THREE ISSUES OF *VISIONS*.
ENCLOSED IS MY CHECK OR MONEY ORDER FOR $10.00

Cut out or send information to:
VISIONS MAGAZINE, INC.
409 COLLEGE AVENUE
ITHACA, NEW YORK 14850

MAIL *VISIONS* TO:
NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____
_____
_____

BEFORE NO. 1 ISSN 0899 - 4919

LETTERS

Denigration of Males???

Michael D. Burke
Houston, TX

Congratulations on your short-short issue. It was the best issue yet, chock full of interesting stories.

Unfortunately, I feel the need to voice two complaints. The first: must strong, intelligent, kind women overcome weak, stupid and evil men in so many of your stories? I am a supporter of the feminist movement, but the continual denigration of males in *MZBfm* is making the magazine take on the tone of network situation comedies, where the male of the species is always outsmarted by women, children and animals. I challenge the writers who submit stories to your magazine to try to craft tales where the gender of a person has no bearing on that character's complement of virtues and vices.

My second complaint is much less important, but still irritating. This is the fourth Cauldron I've voted in, and so far, none of the stories I've voted for have made the top three on your list. In order to help loyal readers such as myself feel less out of step with the rest of humanity, I suggest an issue that is the antithesis to the fine short-short volume. Publish an issue with only five very long stories. That way, one of the three I vote for has to win, place, or show.

Scratch that idea, it wouldn't work in your magazine. I forgot that mathematics is science fiction while you publish fantasy.

Please continue to put out the best speculative fiction magazine available.

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your kind words. As to your first complaint--we can only print what we get. If anyone will write really good stories, we'll print 'em. (But no dumb heroines- or heroes). Regarding the Cauldron–relax, my own favorites often *don't make it into the top three either. Maybe you're just too discriminating. I've found out the hard way, a story I'm particularly fond of is often too much of a rare treat for our readers. So if your favorite story misses the Cualdron---maybe it's* too *good. –MZB*

I would like to consider this question of "MALE BASHING FEMINISTS" seriously. And I would like to have a little more to go on from you readers. I would comment now on my opinion but if I don't wrap this issue up you'll be getting it at Christmas. So please write ASAP with your thoughts and concerns on this subject and we can get into it next issue.

As for favorite stories, Marion is still raving about "Moonrise" (Issue #1). I thought there were some pages missing when I read it. I had to have two people explain it to me! And I was initially absolutely against printing "The Question", her recent favorite in Issue #9, but once I got *it, I thought it was a valid point. Marion does not choose stories haphazzardily. She sees* something*---maybe it's style, or a message (not too obvious), a special characterization, or a special way of presenting point-of-view---but they're all special, in one way or another. Some of them, of course, are better liked than others---that's popularity. But even if a story doesn't at first especially appeal to you, try looking at it more carefully---and write us if you* still *can't figure it out.–jlb*

For my *two cents, I wonder if it isn't the growing, mostly wrongheaded perception that MZB is a feminist, that causes us to get so many stories along those lines? Also---I read somewhere that only the most dedicated followers are likely to take part in this kind of write-in voting, so Cauldron responses are a minority viewpoint to begin with (we could do worse than to admit that to our readers).*

Count me a major supporter of the long-long stories issue! And---well, one last remark: Math isn't science fiction; *it's just Science. It's STATISTICS that are fictional. – DRB*

Statistics: the art of proving a human has one breast and one ball–MZB

Parke Godwin's Editorial – Permission...

Douglas Lent
Wareham, MA

Thank you for another wonderful issue, and especially Parke Godwin's guest editorial. To have to tell the hard truth to anyone is a particularly thankless task, but all the more necessary because of that. Mr. Godwin did a very good job indeed, without cruelty or sugarcoating. In my own case, he did not say anything I had not already realized about myself and am now struggling with. But being able to read about it in a more complete and articulate form from someone more experienced is a help. While I might not agree with everything Mr. Godwin said, he certainly gives one food for thought.

Dear Douglas,

A lot of readers liked Parke Godwin's article on writing so well they wish to pass it out to their writing classes. Only they ask us, *when they should ask* him. *If it's okay with him, it's okay with us. –* MZB

Yes, I talked to Mr. Godwin, and he asked that anyone wishing to utilize his article write to him directly, and include : who you are; for what purpose you intend to use the article; and how many copies you intend to make. His address: Parke Godwin, 144 Almond Street, Auburn, CA, 95603. *I am very happy to see so many people interested in sharing it because Parke put alot of effort into that article. He was willing to put himself right out there on the line, and that's not easy to do –jlb*

Short-Short Issue (#9) / Health...

Charles Cook, Jr.
Cambridge, MA

Attached find my Cauldron ballot. Usually, I rank every story from top to bottom, but in this case, there were just too many of them, and even though I did eventually read every one of them, it became too difficult to make distinctions once I got about half way down my personal preference list. Thus, I have only numerically ranked what turned out to be a "top 18". I hope (and I admit, expect) that this will be enough to be considered a significant input.

Also, while I am writing, let me express my hope and prayer that MZB will make a good recovery---both long and short term---from her recent health problem(s).

Dear Charles,

Many people have expressed interest in my health, and prayers for same. They must have worked, because I'm fine now, and working full time again. –MZB

Marion has often said that Science Fiction Fandom has been a real family to her. The tremendous response during the crisis certainly demonstrated that. I want to thank all of you who called and wrote and offered their support. Chuq von Rospach was kind enough to work overtime to help me with the Short-Short Issue, and many of you kept in daily touch during the worst of it.

The pneumonia, turned out not to be pneumonia at all. She was in such severe heart failure by the time she got to the hospital that the fluid in her lungs masked a mild heart attack.. She has since made tremendous adjustments in her health care, and some of her family and those closest to her say that she's better now than before her first stroke! Some of the physical limitations are tiresome but certainly not life threatening. So you too can now rest easy. She still has the diabeties, of course, which is the basic culprit in all these problems, but she finally *has the tiger in a cage and is now wise to its tricks. It's hard to believe that it's been almost a year now. But we made it. Marion can now get back to writing books and going to*

LETTERS...

conventions, you can spend your time writing great stories and thoughtful letters to the editor, and I can get on to distributiong and advertising the magazine. Let's do it!! – jlb

P.S. Look for Marion at upcoming conventions- we will be running her schedule if not in this column., somewhere in the magazine And thank you again for your helpful thoughts and prayers.–jlb

Lynne Armstrong-Jones
London, Ontario, Canada

I commend you on the tremendous job you all did on the Short-Short Issue. As far as I'm concerned, this is the *best* issue you've done yet. I can't say enough about how terrific it was to open it and find so *many* stories—and in all three areas of sf, fantasy and horror. I have a real weakness for short-shorts; it seems that I am constantly being interrupted, which tends to take away from the enjoyment of longer ones. Short-shorts I can digest in one sitting, which is much easier. The issue was well put-together, too. Not 'chopped-up' at *all*. It is far preferable to have a complete story on each page, rather than having to flip from one section of a 'zine to another, just to read *one* story.

One complaint and only one. There is absolutely no way that selecting my favorite three does justice to the tremendous number of excellent stories! I've submitted my Cauldron votes—all *nine* of them! I implore you to make known the top eight or nine, or at least five! Better yet, how about a top ten?

This is truly an exceptional issue! Please don't faint dead away, Jan and Marion, when you read my next request—

How about *another* short-short issue? PPPlleeease? Maybe once a year or something? You really did a terrific job! I'm looking forward to the next one.

Dear Lynn,

If we get enough requests of this kind, we might do a short-short issue every couple of years. That's contingent on our getting enough stories. –MZB

Thank you Lynn– I was worried that with so many stories that it would look 'chopped-up'. And I don't think I will ever forget my conversation with John Betancourt when I told him that we had this great *idea to do an issue with all these short stories. John said "Jan, how are you going to do that - how are you even going to do the Table of Contents?" Oh details, details! And we learned something too. Marion, since the beginning, has felt that the art just reduced the space availabe for stories. Then when we got down to looking at the Short-Short issue a few weeks ago, she said "there's not enough art in here!" So she's now taken a real interest in this aspect and was very instrumental in this issue's cover– hope you like it.–jlb*

"Literary" vs. "Commercial" Fiction

Dinah Faber
Brewster, KS

I recently had the students I teach in a Fundamentals of Writing class at the local Junior College read Patricia Duffy Novak's "Mathemagics" (Issue #9), for several reasons. One, because I want to reinforce the idea that reading can be fun. Two, because I feel reading good writing improves a person's writing. And three, because of the "message" within the story. I hope they got the point and didn't resent receiving it too much. Time will tell! (Fundamentals is designed to prepare students who need help for Comp. I. Hope Patricia doesn't mind being "required reading".)

Also wanted to mention that I am renewing my subscription with some reservations. It seems to me that fantasy can be divided into at least two broad categories. One is "formula" fantasy written in a certain "slick" style according to a relatively predictable set of rules or expectations. It has its counterparts in other kinds of genre fiction, such as westerns and romances. Much of the work published in the *Sword and Sorceress* anthologies falls within this category.

Then there is another kind of fantasy—a braver, freer kind that isn't afraid to strike out on its own and discover its own limits and the limits of the language. It is this kind of fantasy that I look for and find in such limited quantities in *Fantasy Magazine.*

This kind of fantasy reflects a love of the language, and an understanding of its power. Tolkien's *Silmarillion* comes to mind, particularly the story of Beren and Luthien. It aspires to and achieves the status of—dare I say it—"literature". And by literature, I mean writing that will survive the test of time. Writing with a timeless, universal appeal.

I have read every story in the last four issues of *MZBfm.* There has been only one or two stories per issue that fit into this second, more creative and daring category of fantasy. Among them I would include: "Malevendra's Pool" by Darrell Schweitzer, "The Palace of al-Tir-al-Abtan" by Lawrence Watt-Evans, "Where Is the Great Spirit, Killing Rain?" by Dayl Waldron, "Kill Dance" by Mary A. Turzillo, "Son of the Sun" by Patricia Shaw Mathews, and "Sugar Twin" by Randall Allen Farmer. It is for stories like these that I read *MZBfm.* Unfortunately, there is no way to tell which story is going to be a pearl just from its title or even the editor's blurbs, and so I end up reading a lot of stories that don't appeal to me.

Dear Dinah,

Don't we all! You should see my manuscript file... Seriously, though, you've named two of my own personal favorites, "Kill Dance" and "Son of the Sun". I would print more like them if people out there would write them. So—you have my address. Tell your friends I'm still in here reading, always looking for something good enough to print.

Beyond that, it seems that, once again, you are stating that there is a difference between "literary" and "commercial" fiction. Having earned my living in the marketplace, since I was 22 or so, and I like eating, I naturally tend to print a lot of commercial fiction. David and I have argued about this for years—he makes me sufficiently aware of the importance of the artistic, and I hope *I can keep the magazine sufficiently commercial to stay afloat. (Sorry, kiddies, but I am not in business for my health.) Sooner or later, we will have to pay our own way. I didn't create the marketplace, but if I* hadn't *made my money there, I could never have started this magazine. And the moral of this is, no one can afford to be too literary unless he's also commercial—or financially independent.* –MZB

Thank you for mentioning "Sugar Twin"– I'm always quick to point out such references to Marion, who thought we should have placed a sign on it saying "diabetics beware!!". -jlb

"So many books--so little time..."

Dear Readers,

So many books – so little time. The important thing is to read the right ones. We would like to introduce you to some of the books which have influences other writers. We hope they'll help you find your way through a wilderness of books... because "reading maketh a full man" (Thomas Moore). Full of what? That's a good question. Food for thought! –MZB

WHO SHOULD START???

Paul Dellinger
Wyethville, VA

I read your note about the possible review column for the magazine, in the SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America) Forum, #116. I qualify as to longevity (I've been reading s-f paperbacks since the early 1950's) but I was not sure you wanted reviews from non-names (my SFWA credits include only a few short stories, none of them published recently; I write for a daily newspaper which leaves little time for freelance writing at

present).

My early s-f was the Asimov-Heinlein-Bradbury-Pohl-Clarke route. I gather from your letter that you want only a few graphs about particular books? It sounds interesting, and quite different from regular review columns.

Dear Paul,

Well, I'm a nobody too–I always thought that if a thing really *interested* me, *it would interest somebody else, which is why I'm an editor. And I'm interested in what* **you** *think---and I think other people are, too.* **-MZB**

John Brunner

Brunner Fact & Fiction Limited
Square House, Palmer Street
South Petherton, Somerset, England

Suppose you were a geologist prospecting among lonely hills who got bitten by a rattlesnake, and lay for days recovering in a tumbledown shack... and eventually trudged home, weak and exhausted, to find the world you'd left as devoid of people as the forest, its cities as abandoned as that shack. A deadly sickness has been carried round the world by the speed of modern air-travel faster than humans can become immune to it. Only a handful of people have survived. You're among the lucky ones. That snakebite saved you.

Or... are you so lucky?

Oh, there's still light when you click the switch---still water at the sink---still food in the stores. How long, though, can machines keep running without people to tend them? And when they break down... what will happen then?

That's the fascinating postulate of *Earth Abides,* by George R. Stewart (winner of the International Fantasy Award, 1951).

But what makes it stand head and shoulders above countless other such disaster stories is the sheer quality of Stewart's writing. He used a deliberately plain style, modelled to some extent on the King James Bible. There's a passage where a group of survivors have to decide what to do with a new recruit who's suffering from "social" diseases that they cannot treat---shall they banish him, or must they kill him?---which still makes the hairs prickle on my nape, and I first read it nearly forty years ago.

If you see this novel, grab it. It's unique.

Dear John,

I remember reading this in about 1956 – it's one of my favorites too **–MZB**

SOME INSIGHTS– By One of our own writers...

Lynne Armstrong-Jones
London, Ontario, Canada

Science fiction? Fantasy?

Where does it all begin? At what point in our lives do we begin deciding (consciously or unconsciously) what types of reading to pursue?

I remember vividly the 'science fiction' and 'fantasy' novels which affected me so greatly, so many years ago. When I look back at it all, I see strong similarities among some:

Stranger in a Strange Land, R. Heinlein
Brave New World, A. Huxley
The Man Who Fell to Earth, W. Tevis

In all three of these, we are watching the struggle of someone 'alien' as he tries to somehow adjust to the Earth society surrounding him. In all three, we see our own society through the eyes of a newcomer, someone who can look upon our culture with an objective view. In all three, these images of our society are quite negative, although certain individuals *do* show compassion toward each 'alien' and offer assistance.

And, in all three, our 'alien' is destroyed (at least to some extent) by that society whose shortcomings are being satirized.

Analogies to Christ, the betrayal and crucifixion? Perhaps.

For me as a young adult (oh, so many years ago!), these novels were very important; they taught me to take a close look at the society which I was a part of, and to question where I fit in. And the process of such questioning can provide valuable insight.

One character taught me that the most important thing to be in life is *yourself;* to find within oneself those aspects which make each of us unique. And, despite the pressures of society, to stand firm and *be* whatever it is which makes one an individual.

Learning about our society is an important part of growing into adulthood; however, it is not nearly as important as gaining insight into oneself.

Thank you, Messrs. Heinlein, Huxley and Tevis, for teaching me to question what surrounds me. And also, to look *inside* for answers.

Dear Lynn,

And now here you are writing for us. Beware---see what it can do to you. –MZB

ONE OF MY FAVORITES...

Patricia Shaw Mathews
Albequerque, NM

One book that influenced me greatly thirty years ago was Wilmar Shiras' *Children of the Atom,* the all-time classic gifted child story that struck a raw nerve in everyone 'abnormal' enough to read science fiction who was trapped in the most aggressively 'normal' age in recent history. Gifted children, in 1950, were not 'normal'; they were comic characters like Dilton Doily, with his five-dollar words and obvious immaturity; or like Shiras' characters, or Jommy Cross, mutations in serious danger of being lynched. Yet, Shiras' young heroes' gifts, enthusiasms, projects, and conversations are very like those of today's bright young polymaths who fill the honors classes and science fairs. Our children, bright, happy, noisy, and having fun. A pity they couldn't have been us, or we, them.

Dear Pat, Yes – so was Olaf Stapleton's ***Odd John.*** *–* **MZB**

(Comment, DRB: this was also one of my favorites. The Jommy Cross reference is to the A.E. van Vogt story, SLAN, which was about a young telepath, who was widely identified with in s-f circles.)

WASTING YOUR TIME ON SCIENCE FICTION?

Howard V. Hendrix, Clovis, CA

I noted your request in SFWA Forum #116 for a paragraph or two on SF Books that had an influence early on in my career---books I would recommend to young people. I thought I'd throw in my two cents' worth, so here it is.

Reading Alan E. Nourse's 1962 young adult novel *Raiders From the Rings (RFTR)* was for me the paradigmatic experience of what reading a science fiction novel should be like---probably because it was the first sf novel (perhaps the first full novel of any sort) I ever read. As I recall I read Nourse's book in 1968, when the book was six years old and I was nine. In later years, I failed to recall much of the plot, but I always remembered the profound impact it had on me---an impact rivaled (but never equalled) by my later first readings of Clarke's *Earthlight,* Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz,* Asimov's "Nightfall" and Cogswell's "The Wall Around the World".

The source of that powerful impact could have many names---a "sense of wonder", the "unfolding of the illimitable vistas of possibility in a young mind"---call it what you will. For me it was the fitting of a key marked Future directly into a slot in the pleasure center of my brain, a key which like Benjamin Franklin's lightning finder was somehow tied to a high-flying kite aloft in a turbulence of energy. Reading Nourse's book was what turned me into a reader to begin with, the original experience that revealed to me the pleasure of the text in all its enthralling power. I am not saying that on some absolute scale of "literary value"

Letters column continued on page 62...

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

"The Best Magazine About Science Fiction."

— Mark J. McGarry, author of *Sundogs*

Upcoming issues include:

Interviews with **Marion Zimmer Bradley**, Isaac Asimov, Robert Sheckley, Avram Davidson, Jack L. Chalker, Vernor Vinge.
Columns by Orson Scott Card, Alan Dean Foster, Steven Barnes, Pamela Sargent, Charles de Lint, Gene DeWeese, Richard E. Geis and more.
Essays by Gregory Benford, Barry N. Malzberg, Arthur Byron Cover, Steve Perry, John Dalmas, George Zebrowski.
Fiction by Jerry Oltion, Phil Jennings, J. Steven York, Scott Edelman.
Special Science Sections on Wormholes, FTL Travel and Time Machines; Chaos Theory; Biotechnology; Cold Fusion.
Each issue also features Cover Artwork and Interior Illustrations by artists including Alexis Gilliland, William Rotsler, Tim Kirk, Steven Fabian, John Oberdorf, Mark J. Ferrari.

Back issues include:

Issue #1 — $10 (120 pages) — Robert A. Heinlein, His Last Interview. Columns by Barnes, Sargent, Card, Geis, De Lint, DeWeese and more. Interviews with Michael Bishop, Richard E. Geis and John G. Cramer. Fiction and Essays by Gregory Benford, Pamela Sargent, George Zebrowski, Richard E. Geis. Special Science Section on Nanotechnology. 100 Book Reviews.
Issue #2 — $6 (80 pages) — Interviews with Ursula K. Le Guin, Roger Zelazny. Fiction and Essays by Gregory Benford, Jerry Oltion, J. Steven York, George Zebrowski. New Columnist: Alan Dean Foster on Film. Special Science Section on Spaceflight. Book Reviews, Letters and more.
Issue #3 — $7.95 (116 pages) — Interviews with Ursula K. Le Guin (continued), Stanislaw Lem. Essays and Fiction by Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Chuck Rothman, Bruce Bethke, Norm Hartman. Special Science Section on Computers. All of our regular columnists, lots of Book Reviews and Letters.

— —

Please enter my subscription for Science Fiction Review (SFR). All subscriptions are payable in U.S. Funds. Please make checks payable to: **SFR Publications.**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____

Enclosed, please find (check one, please) [**Note** — Canadian subscribers please add two U.S. dollars per rate]:

☐ $25 U.S. for four issues
☐ $30 U.S. for four issues — first class
☐ $45 U.S. for eight issues
☐ $50 U.S. for eight issues — first class
☐ $35 U.S. for four issues, foreign (non-U.S. and non-Canadian) subscribers — surface/sea mail
☐ $40 U.S. for four issues, foreign (non-U.S. and non-Canadian) subscribers — air mail

SFR Publications ▪ PO Box 20340 ▪ Salem ▪ OR 97307

CONTRIBUTORS

A Dollar for Your Soul
EARL VICKERS

I worked for eight years as a designer of music and sound effects for video games. As soon as I was reasonably sure I had done enough explosion sounds for one lifetime, I moved to Costa Rica and sought official Refugee from Reality status. I worked for a month as a volunteer for a shortwave station, Radio for Peace International, and then moved to a small cabin on the edge of a cloud forest. Now I'm back in California, selling cassette tapes of tropical rainforest sounds I recorded in the jungle. This will be my first piece of published fiction.

A Wizard Beside Himself
JOHN MORESSY

I published my first book, a mainstream novel (*The Blackboard Cavalier,* Doubleday), in 1966, my first sf novel (*Starbrat,* Walker) in 1972, and my first fantasy novel (*Ironbrand,* Playboy) in 1980. My latest novel to be published is a light fantasy, *A Remembrance for Kedrigern* (Ace, 1990), the fifth book in a series featuring the characters in 'A Wizard Beside Himself'.

My short stories have appeared in *Asimov's, Dragon, F&SF, Omni, Twilight Zone,* and in mainstream and professional publications. As might be expected, I am at present working on a fantasy novel.

I have a full-time position as Professor of English at Franklin Pierce College. That, plus the writing, keeps me so busy that my outside interests are confined to long walks with my wife (editor/critic/conscience) Barbara; observing the behavior of my two cats; and fighting off the encroaching wilderness that constantly threatens to overwhelm my garden. And I read, read, read.

I do look forward to my first appearance in your magazine.

Cat Fight
BECKY SPARKS

I work full time for the City of Roseville as an Administrative Clerk II (that's a glorified Typist Clerk, for anyone not fluent in government doublespeak), and part-time as a partner in a craft business tht makes period clothing for sale at local Renaissance fairs.

I live in a menagerie of animals, including an entire smug of housecats, among them Tiphaine (known as 'the Weasel') who was the inspiration for this story, and a very patient roommate who nagged me into this submittal.

Writing is something I've done since I was old enough to realize that I could actually put my fantasies down on paper at the age of eight years old. I guess I come by it naturally, as both my mother and grandmother have written poetry since long before my birth.

This is the first time that I have ever managed to screw up my courage and actually submit something.

Deep Catch
AL ONIA

I am a geophysicist, living in Calgary with my wife and two children. I have been writing short stories for a few years with the support and input of the Imaginative Fiction Writers' Association, based in Calgary. This is my first professional sale and your P. O. Box hasn't seen the last of me.

Feodor Felonis and the Thief
BOB LIDDIL

Bob is a freelance writer from Peterborough, New Hampshire. This is his third appearance in our magazine. Bob has just had two new books released this summer, *Apothecary On the Street of Dreams* and *The 30-Sided Character and Other Tales,* both for the fantasy adventure game market, in which Bob is quite active. In the past, he's been a specialist in computer and video software technical writing; a fantasy fiction publisher of sorts; traveled in England; and always quested for the perfectly comfortable chair. (P.O. Box 66, Peterborough, NH, 03458.)

Playing Dead
STEVE RASNIC TEM

Has sold approximately 150 short stories to date in the mystery, horror, science fiction, and western genres, to such publications as *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine, The Saint Magazine, Twilight Zone Magazine, Shadows, Year's Best Fantasy,* and *Asimov's.* He has stories forthcoming in Robert Bloch's *Psycho Paths I and II, Cold Shocks, Tales of the Wandering Jew, Weird Tales,* and *Pulphouse.* He has also published over 100 poems and a variety of nonfiction. He has been nominated for both the British Fantasy Award and the World Fantasy Award for his short fiction, winning the British Fantasy Award for Short Fiction in 1988, for his short story "Leaks" *(Whispers VI).* The poetry anthology he edited, *The Umbral Anthology of SF Poetry,* was a finalist for the first Phillip K. Dick Award. His first novel, *Excavation,* a Bram Stoker Award nominee, appeared in 1987 from Avon. In 1991, England's Haunted Library will publish a collection of his traditional ghost stories entitled *Absences: Charlie Goode's Ghosts.* He and his family live in a hilltop Victorian in old northwest Denver.

Potion
JOSEPH M. KURTENBACH

Besides 'Potion', I've placed two other stories, with *Science Fiction Randomly* and *The Mythic Circle,* though 'Potion' will likely be the first to see print. Another of my stories received Honorable Mention in *L. Ron Hubbard's Writer's of the Future Contest.* I'm currently slowly at work on my first novel, tentatively titled *A Reign of Magic.* I've been writing here and there about ten years.

I'm thirty years old, a registered veterinary technician, and currently working in Rhode Island as a zookeeper. I grew up in Nebraska, and have lived in a few other assorted states. I'm single and share my tiny apartment with stacks of books and magazines I don't have time to read. I enjoy whale watches and other wonders of nature. My favorite movie is *The Empire Strikes Back.* Someday I hope to own a light sabre.

Satanic, Versus...
MERCEDES LACKEY

Although a graduate in Biology/Animal Behavior from Purdue, Mercedes has been working for the last eleven years as a computer programer for American Airlines in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

She started writing in about 1982 because she was bored. For the first three years, she wrote for fan magazines, "to get my material up to professional standards".

She now has written over a dozen novels, one of them—*Children of the Night* —based on the story "Nightside" printed in MZBfm Issue #6. Her story "Road Kill" was published in our Short-Short Issue #9. She names MZB, C. J. Cherryh among the major influences on her career.

The Bane of the Red Queen

KIT W. WESLER

Kit's first sale was "Flowers", published in our Short-Short Issue #9. He "began submitting stories in high school and college, in the early '70s, but set attempted fiction-writing aside when he entered graduater school and sitting in front of a typewriter became a chore". An archaeologist with research interests and field experience in the U. S. and Nigeria, Kit works for Murray State University in Western Kentucky, and at last notice was "working on assemblage pattern recognition, and considering the nature of small-scale ranked societies—with obvious potential for stirring literature".

The Loser

JOHN DOWNING

My background is strictly mathematics. I earned my degree in math from Fordham University, a Master's in math education from NYU, and for the past twenty-five years I have taught math in a junior high school here in Brooklyn. I write, if I can find the time and energy, in the evening and on weekends.

"'The Loser' is my first published work. (Some years back I sold a mystery story to the *New Black Mask Quarterly*. But the magazine folded before the story could be published. I never saw a contract and, since I was to be paid on publication, I received no payment.) I'm glad you like the story. I hope that it's the first of many." (*And he's not the only one., –DRB)*

The Reluctant Vampire

DEBORAH MILLITELLO

This is my fifth sale, the third to *MZBfm.*. This story was written for the short-short issue (my third try at that—I guess third time's a charm!). I have a story in the October issue of *Dragon Magazine* and another in the May issue. An agent has the first book in a four-book fantasy series, and I've started another series with a male protagonist (seems there's a glut of female protagonists right now). I'm also working on a story for a shared-world anthology.

I'm now a grandmother. Eight-month-old Adam thinks my computer is the best toy in the house. I think I'm going to have to lock it up—or maybe I'll teach him to type when he's older. Perhaps he'll be a writer, too. - *(What a wonderful Grandmother Deborah- your first thought is to lock the computer up - I'm happy that it wasn't to lock Adam up!-jlb)*

Vassilissa the Fair

MICOLE SUDBERG

I'm a senior at Hunter College High School, a small brick building with no windows which looks very peculiar, since it's stuck among all the sky-scrapers on Carnegie Hill in NY City. I live on Staten Island; have sold one story to Domains of Darkover; am currently working as an editorial intern at Tor Books.

Witch Hunt

BOBBI MILLER

Born and raised in Colorado, Bobbi graduated from the University of Colorado in Journalism, and is presently an assistant editor of the **Hand Weavers Guild of America**, a quartely publication. She moved with her husband and children to Connecticut only a year ago. (With two teanage girls, her defense is to hide in the bathroom and turn on the fan!)

Bobbi has been writing all her life: freelance writing (non fiction), editing, whatever it took to pay the bills. It was from a series of family tragedies that she came to realize the necessity to focus on your dreams. Her most recent publication is "Wolf Hunt" in MZB's Sword and Sorceress #VI. Be sure to look for it in your loacal bookstore! She keeps her back issues of *Fantasy Magazine,* among others, handy to read and reread, and draws inspiration from studying the characterization and the use of detail in her favorite stories. ❧

LETTERS... (c ntinued form page 59)

Nourse's work is "better" than Clarke's or Chaucer's, Miller's or Shakespeare's, Asimov's or Joyce's, Cogswell's or Pynchon's—but had I not found Nourse's young adult novel at age nine, it's at least possible that I might never have gone on to read any of those other writers.

It may seem a long leap from the reading of a young adult science fiction novel in my formative years to later decisions that led me to a Bachelor's degree in Biology and a Ph. D. in English Literature, but the leap has been largely a smooth and seamless one. Reading the genre that *RFTR* introduced me to kept me reading addictedly throughout my teens—an age when all too many students in our post-literate culture lose interest in the pleasure of the text or fail to develop that interest at all. To say that Alan E. Nourse's *Raiders From the Rings* helped in some sense to make me the person I am is to say something at once profound and trivial—and true.

I could say far more, but it might be better if I just shut up and let you go find it and read it for yourself. Though time has in some ways not been kind to *RFTR,* the fundamental theme— human violence as a manifestation of our immaturity and selfishness as a species—is at least as relevant today as it was on the day it was published. Though it is categorized as a young adult novel, I recommend it strongly to readers of all ages.

Having left academia to write full time, I am at present a columnist for the quarterly science fiction magazine *Starshore.*

Dear Howard,

When I was a kid, they used to say "Don't waste your time reading -or writing- sf." Times have changed. –MZB ❧

NOTE: David wanted me to I mention he did not have the opportunity to proofread this column. Marion insists that I am a terrific editor - and is willing to over look the fact that I don't type, and I can't spell. You dedicated subscribers may possibly have noticed that! I remember telling my future husband, that I thought spending our lives together would work out just great - there were only two things he needed to know - I don't cook and I don't clean, but other than that no problem. So if I can ever complete this column, not to mention the whole issue, early enough to have it proofread, we may make it yet!! – jlb

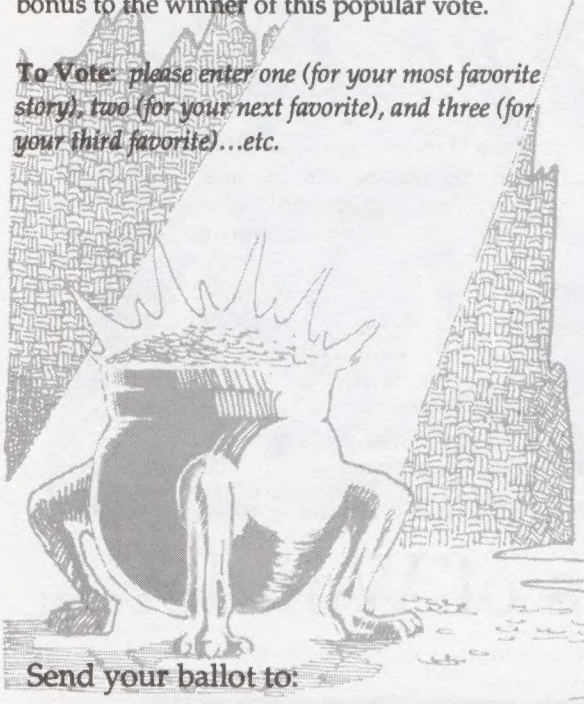
At the End of the Rainbow:

Vote For Your Favorite Story

please note selection process below

Every professional writer wishes that there were better pay in the field. Except for a few superstars, nobody gets rich writing science fiction or fantasy. Most of us, for the first few years at least, do it because we love it. But writing is a business; and we like to offer incentives. Won't you take just a minute now to tear (or copy) this form from the magazine, and vote for the story you liked best? We will pay a bonus to the winner of this popular vote.

To Vote: *please enter one (for your most favorite story), two (for your next favorite), and three (for your third favorite)...etc.*



Send your ballot to:

Vassilissa The Fair
by Micole Sudberg page 4 ❑

Satanic, Versus...
by Mercedes Lackey page 6 ❑

A Dollar For Your Soul
by Earl Vickers page 12 ❑

Witch Hunt
by Bobbi Miller page 17 ❑

What A Wizard Does
by Janet Kagan page 20 ❑

Potion
by Joseph M. Kurtenbach page 25 ❑

The Loser
by John Downing page 28 ❑

The Wizard Beside Himself
by John Morressy page 32 ❑

Playing Dead
by Steve Rasnic Tem page 38 ❑

The Reluctant Vampire
by Deborah Millitello page 43 ❑

Deep Catch
by Al Onia page 45 ❑

The Bane of the Red Queen
by Kit Wesler page 49 ❑

Feodor Felonis and the Thief
by Bob Liddil page 51 ❑

Cat Fight
by Becky Sparks page 53 ❑

Domestic USA

FANTASY MAGAZINE
P.O. BOX 11095
OAKLAND, CA 94611-9991

the CAULDRON

SUBSCRIBE NOW . . .

And Look Into Worlds of Wonder

❑ ***Yes,*** *I want to subscribe to Marion Zimmer Bradley's* ***Fantasy Magazine TODAY!***
I understand the cost is $14.00 for four issues in U.S., $20.00 for Canada, $30.00 for foreign subscriptions, payable in U.S. funds.

❑ ***Payment enclosed*** $_____ ❑ ***Please bill me***

NAME _____

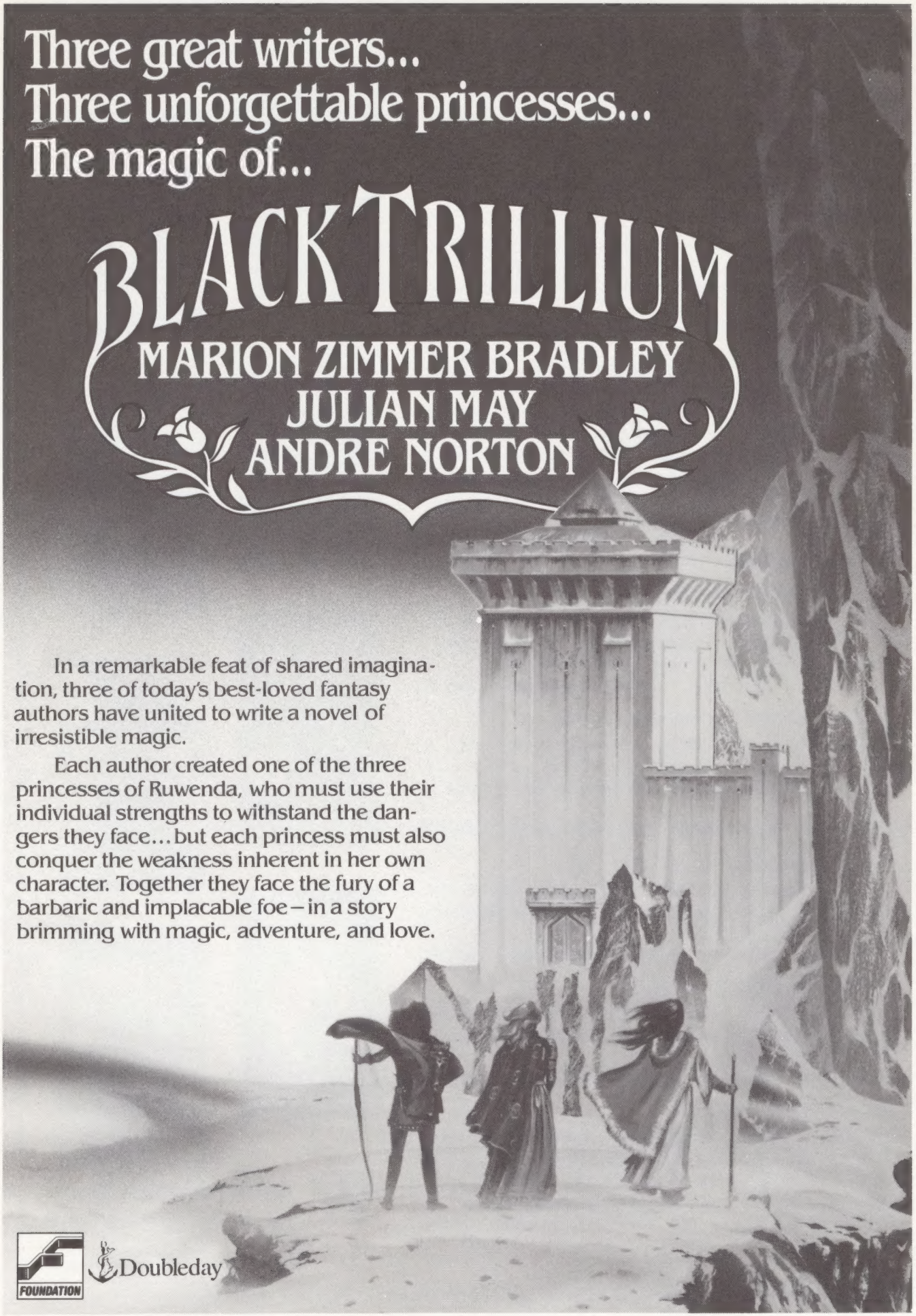
STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY_____ STATE_____ ZIP/CODE_____

Marion Zimmer Bradley's ***Fantasy Magazine***

P.O. Box 11095, Oakland, CA 94611-9991

Thank You !

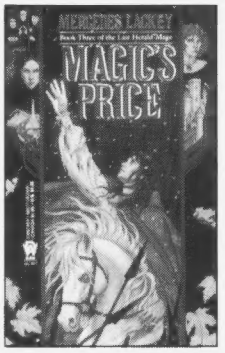

Three great writers...
Three unforgettable princesses...
The magic of...
BLACK TRILLIUM
MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY
JULIAN MAY
ANDRE NORTON
In a remarkable feat of shared imagination, three of today's best-loved fantasy authors have united to write a novel of irresistible magic.
Each author created one of the three princesses of Ruwenda, who must use their individual strengths to withstand the dangers they face... but each princess must also conquer the weakness inherent in her own character. Together they face the fury of a barbaric and implacable foe – in a story brimming with magic, adventure, and love.
FOUNDATION
Doubleday

New from DAW Books!

MAGIC'S PRICE (The Last Herald-Mage #3) *by Mercedes Lackey*

As the kingdom is besieged on all fronts, only Vanyel, the last Herald-Mage of Valdemar, remains to defend his people against the final onslaught by a master of dark, forbidden magic.

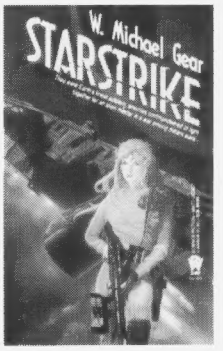
0-88677-426-8 Fantasy/Original $4.50 ($4.95 in Canada) Jul. '90



STARSTRIKE *by W. Michael Gear*

American, British, Russian, Israeli—they were among Earth's finest soldiers, commandeered to fight for an alien master in a war among distant stars. Could they overcome their mutual distrust to league together against an enemy ready to sacrifice the entire human race?

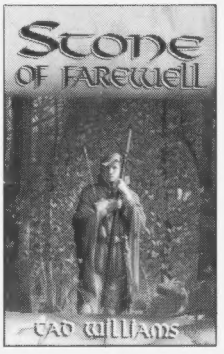
0-88677-427-6 SF/Original $4.95 ($5.95 in Canada) Jul. '90



STONE OF FAREWELL (Memory, Sorrow and Thorn #2) *by Tad Williams*

In this long-awaited sequel to the best-selling *The Dragonbone Chair,* the dark magic and dread minions of the undead Sithi ruler are spreading their seemingly undefeatable evil across the land. And as the tattered remnants of a once-proud human army flee in search of a last sanctuary and rallying point, the last survivors of the League of the Scroll seek to fulfill missions which will take them from the fallen citadels of humans to the secret heartland of the Sithi.

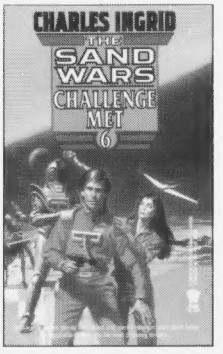
0-88677-435-7 HARDCOVER Fantasy/Original
$21.95 ($26.95 in Canada) Aug. '90



CHALLENGE MET (Sand Wars #6) *by Charles Ingrid*

Dominion Knight Jack Storm is finally offered the chance to regain his lost past—at the risk of becoming a helpless pawn of the forces he's been fighting to overcome—in this dramatic conclusion to the Sand Wars series.

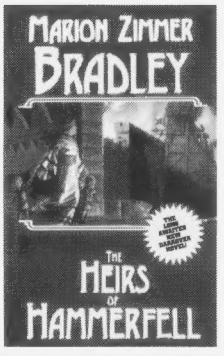
0-88677-436-5 SF/Original $3.95 ($4.95 in Canada) Aug. '90



HEIRS OF HAMMERFELL *by Marion Zimmer Bradley*

First paperback edition of the first new Darkover novel in over five years. A devastating war between two kingdoms comes to its climax as the sons of a murdered lord fight to reclaim their stolen heritage through the powers of *laran.*

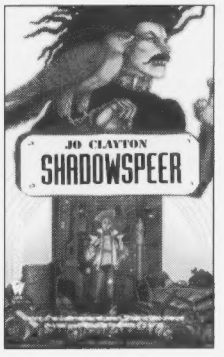
0-88677-451-8 Fantasy/Original $4.95 ($5.95 in Canada) Sep. '90



SHADOWSPEER (Shadith's Quest #2) *by Jo Clayton*

Using all her Diadem-awakened powers, Shadith and her allies are on a star-spanning hunt for her former captor, the being whom she had come to know as the destroyer of worlds.

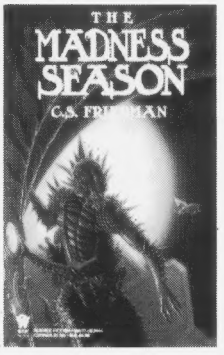
0-88677-441-1 SF/Original $4.50 ($4.95 in Canada) Sep. '90



THE MADNESS SEASON *by C. S. Friedman*

A brand-new science fiction tour de force from the best-selling author of *In Conquest Born.* How could Daetrin survive the alien conquest if he could not conquer all that was alien within himself?

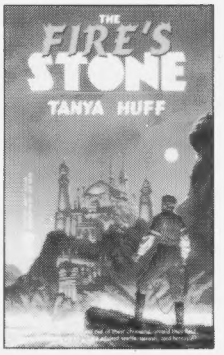
0-88677-444-6 SF/Original $4.95 ($5.95 in Canada) Oct. '90



THE FIRE'S STONE *by Tanya Huff*

Thief, prince, and wizardess—all three sought the return of the magical Stone that kept the city safe from the volcano's fiery wrath. But, driven by their separate needs, could they learn to trust one another to unite against a sorcerous foe able to turn the powers of The Stone against them?

0-88677-445-4 Fantasy/Original $3.95 ($4.95 in Canada) Oct. '90



DAW Books, Inc.

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:
Elsie B. Wollheim, DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014